

A N
A P P E A L
T O
COMMON SENSE
IN BEHALF OF
RELIGION.

VOLUME SECOND.

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MDCCLXXII.

A NEW PAPER

Good and true
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SOME may think, that this Appeal sought to have set out with a definition of *Common Sense*; but the author never meant an appeal to those who are destitute of this faculty, or need to be informed of its high authority. Common opinion, just or unjust, may pass for common sense with the unthinking multitude; but a man of discernment never admits vulgar prejudices or doubtful opinions into his idea of common sense; nor, in the multitude of appeals daily made to this tribunal, does he expect any other decision than what arises necessarily from the simple authority of reason, or that capacity of pronouncing on obvious truth and palpable absurdity, by which rational beings are distinguished from idiots and lower animals. In book 4. ch. 2. vol. 1. of this Appeal, there is express mention

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of this characteristical power of the rational mind, which, on account of its quickness, clearness, and indubitable certainty, is there called *sense*; and on account of its being possessed in one degree or other by all of the rational kind, is called *common sense*. And in book 6. ch. 4. of the same volume, instances are given, not only of false, but nonsensical, opinions, which commonly prevail, but cannot be imputed to common sense; and in that place, the right of appealing from common opinion, which is often on the side of error, to common sense, which is always on the side of truth, is largely insisted on; and this the author thought sufficient to supersede the necessity of a formal definition.

Definitions have their use on disputable subjects; but if one should ask the judgment of another on the difference betwixt black and white, sweet and bitter, he would, in place of all definitions, set black and white before him, and make
him

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him taste sweet and bitter: And in the present Appeal, the author shall content himself with setting before his reader the primary truths of religion and morality, with their opposite absurdities; and only begs he will keep in mind the much celebrated advice,—Know thyself.

Ask a man of humanity, why he abhors a cruel action, and he immediately recurs to something within him that justifies his sentiments; ask a man of honour, why he disdains a base action, and he in like manner hath recourse to a principle within him that authorises his disdain; and on common subjects, if you ask a man of sense, why he rejects flat nonsense, he also will appeal to a faculty of which he is conscious, and of which he supposes you, and all rational beings, are conscious: but in judging of the primary truths of religion and morality, you shall not find many who are capable of rejecting the futile surmises of sceptics, with the dignity and firmness becoming

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ming rational beings. On this account, the author must again beg of his reader to keep in mind the much celebrated advice of the ancient sages, — Know thyself.

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OF MAN
A P P E A L
T O
C O M M O N S E N S E
I N B E H A L F O F
R E L I G I O N.
VOLUME SECOND.

B O O K I.

Of the authority on which we admit primary truths.

C H A P T E R I.

Reason requires our admitting primary truths on its authority alone, under the penalty of being convicted of folly and nonsense if we do not.

AS young children, who have been led too long by the hand, or too long accustomed to go by a bold, are timid, apt to stagger, and be in danger of falling when they first

make trial of their legs; so the learned, and after them the unlearned, have been so long accustomed to arguments and proofs for almost every truth they believe, that you shall find them hesitate and waver, and be in danger of scepticism, in judging of the plainest and most obvious truths, when unsupported by those arguments, proofs, and reasons, as they are called, to which they have been so long accustomed. Nevertheless there are truths in nature, not a few, and those too of great consequence, which, in all reason, they may, and which, if they do not give up with all pretensions to reason, they must believe, without assigning any particular reason, proof, or argument, for this belief. The truths which may, and ought to be believed in this manner, are fundamental to all the arts and sciences, and fundamental maxims of civil, moral, and religious conduct; and the little acquaintance men have with them, and the little confidence they put in them, is one of the chief causes of the errors and follies they run into perpetually, both in theory and practice. It may therefore be fit to take these truths into particular consideration,

tion, and try the strength of our minds upon them: And this we shall do, without demanding any degree of credibility to the primary truths of religion and morality, beyond what is allowed to other primary truths, and without being satisfied with less: for as no primary truth hath, or can have, any other evidence than the simple dictates of reason and common sense; and as this kind of evidence is as full and complete for the primary truths of religion, as for any other first principles; so we know no right a man can have to think more nonsensically on religion than on any other subject.

The severe treatment given to Monsieur Des Cartes for attempting a proof of his own existence, will, it is probable, prevent a repetition of the same folly; and we find accordingly, that the greatest sceptics are willing to take their existence for granted, and say boldly, that they believe they do exist. They affirm, that they are conscious of their existence; and this consciousness they seem to consider as a proof, and rest upon it. But in that they act less philosophically than Monf. Des Cartes; for if consciousness is to be used as a

proof, it must be applied to thinking, and not to existence, as we may be conscious of an action, but hardly can be said to be conscious of mere existence. The truth is, that we must believe our existence on this ground solely, that we should be great fools to call it once in question. So here is one truth, which, without any proof, argument, or reason, as it is called, we believe, and must believe, if we are not willing to give up with all pretensions to rationality.

We have the same evidence for our identity that we have for our existence: for as we know, with the utmost certainty, that we exist; so with the same certainty we know, that we who exist now, are the same persons we were last week, last year, and twenty years backward. So here is another truth, which, if we do not mean to play the fool, we must believe, not only without any particular reason, argument, or proof, but in opposition to many plausible arguments and reasons to the contrary; for it is demonstrable, that in twenty years time, every lineament of a man's countenance, and every affection and sentiment of his soul, may be changed,

ged, and he remain the identical person he was twenty years before. What then is identity? and wherein doth it consist? In this we are at as complete a stand as we can be on the most abstruse point of religion and morality. Here then is a truth, that, in all conscience, ought to stagger sceptics; for how shall they believe that of which they can give no rational account, and for which they have no particular evidence? — and yet believe they must. Yes, Gentlemen, you must believe, or give up all pretensions to rationality.

We have the same perception of the existence and identity of the objects around us, that we have of our own identity and existence; and can as little doubt the one as the other. It is true, that of late we have been taught to separate qualities from substances, and to regard the first as proper objects of knowledge and belief, but not the last. This, however, is no new device. As soon as the church of Rome adopted the doctrine of the real presence, they found themselves under the necessity of making this separation. But all Protestants reject the doctrine as flat nonsense. It is nonsense to talk of a round, hard, smooth,

smooth, white, nothing ; and therefore, in defiance of the refinements of bigots and sceptics, we must affirm, without hesitation, that the houses, trees, rivers, and animals, which we perceive, are not mere ideas, but realities existing without us. And having thus, by the exercise of that faculty of judging by which we are distinguished from idiots, and the lower animals, attained a firm belief of our existence and identity, with the existence and identity of the objects around us, we have reached that solid foundation on which all the arts and sciences rest, and on which we may, with great safety, raise any superstructure we chuse of useful knowledge.

Figure, size, number, and situation, are the first things that occur to our observation on the objects around us, and on all these we pronounce with the same certainty, and by the same faculty of judging, with which we pronounce on their existence. We cannot, without applying a rule, fix the number of feet or inches by which one object exceeds another in height or distance; but if we are not idiots, we can, by mere inspection, and without the help

help of any medium, affirm, that the house is higher than the trees in the garden, and that one animal stands nearer to the wall than another. Without calculation, we cannot pronounce on the number of trees or animals that are objects of our attention; but we can say with certainty, that the number is considerable. And, finally, we can, without the help of reasoning, and by a simple act of judgement, discover a great variety of truths, concerning figure, dimension, and number; and those obvious truths make the first principles of mathematics.

By a simple act of judgement on the obvious qualities of those objects we get acquainted with, we settle the first principles of natural philosophy. We are positive, that heavy bodies will go to the ground; that lead will sink in water; that fire will consume wood, and other combustibles; that bread is fit to nourish our bodies: and whoever seems to hesitate about the truth of these first principles, comes under the suspicion of idiotism.

We know with certainty, that beasts, birds, and fishes, have a power of perception.

ception and feeling, with a power of giving themselves motion in all variety of directions, which stones and timber have not; and this we denominate *animal life*. But what is animal life? and wherein doth it consist? Of this we know just as much, and no more, than we know of other subjects which are deemed mysterious: yet none but fools will doubt of its reality.

By attending to the procedure of animals, we observe a foresight, a skill and sagacity, in providing for their own and family's safety; which we must acknowledge, not only as a reality in nature, but worthy also of high admiration, unless we affect to be idiots. To observe beasts run, birds fly, and fishes swim, and deny that they have a power of doing so, is as great nonsense as to deny their existence: and to acknowledge the parental care of animals in feeding and rearing their young, and not admire it, or not acknowledge it to be worthy of high admiration, betrays the same folly as to deny their power, or even their existence. And further, by attending to the behaviour of some animals, of dogs in particular, we see plain symptoms,

toms, not only of admirable sagacity, but of benevolence, of courage, and fidelity, that are intitled both to our love and esteem; and to deny or doubt of these realities, or of the esteem and affection due to them, is to renounce all pretensions to the understanding of a man, as effectually as by denying, that two and three make five; for we have equally good reason for giving our assent to the one truth as to the other.

C H A P. II.

The same subject continued.

ON turning our attention to those of our own species, we become acquainted with a reality which doth not appear in any other object, but on which we must pronounce (if we do not mean to play the fool) with the same steadiness and firmness with which we pronounce on other realities. We find in man, not only the organs of sense, but the appetites and affections which belong to other animals; and not only the lower and grosser affections, but those noble instincts also which

are the objects of our love and esteem: and when they appear in equal strength, and with equal evidence, in men, as they do in other animals, we are bound to hold them in the same degree of estimation. But we have undoubted evidence for a superior excellence in man, which is intitled to a superior regard. We cannot regard a hog and a horse, a dog and a toad, with the same degree of estimation, without discovering a degree of stupidity disgraceful to human nature; and much less can we pay the same regard to a villain that is due to an honest man, without discovering an insensibility still more disgraceful.

We admire the grand and love the benevolent affections and actions of mere animals; but cannot make them subjects of moral approbation, because we know they do not proceed from judgement and free choice: but must approve of the man who, without the help of instinct or animal impulse, and sometimes in contradiction to both, does great and good actions from judgement and free choice. We despise the mean and abhor the malignant affections and actions of mere animals; yet cannot condemn them, because

cause we know they do not proceed from choice: but must condemn the same affections and actions in a man, when they appear to flow from free choice; and must heighten this condemnation in proportion to the freedom of choice with which he acts. One would be apt to say, that we are so constituted, that we must pronounce in this manner on vice and virtue, were it not that unhappily we find something in our constitution that disposes us to qualify, and even to shuffle and prevaricate, on these subjects. But in spite of that perversion of judgement which too often arises from our exorbitant affections, still something will be found in the constitution of man that bears witness to the truth.

That the human understanding, with all the powers of the rational soul, are as capable of perversion as the limbs and features of the human body, and that the perversion in the one may be as monstrous and unnatural as the distortion in the other, will not be denied; but in spite of all perversion which can take place, any one above the level of an idiot may perceive the difference betwixt vice and vir-

tue, when both are put full in his view. In spite of the utmost propension of a corrupt heart, aided by all the skill of a cunning head, any one who is neither fool nor madman, may be made to pass a true judgement when he is taken off his guard. Observe the sentiments which rise naturally in the heart of a villain in perusing the actions of men, in fable or history; and take notice likewise of the sentiments which drop unawares from these men in judging of transactions of common life wherein they are not interested; and you will see the force of truth.

Though, from a variety of causes too well known to need being mentioned, there is greater diversity of judgement in pronouncing on vice and virtue, than on shape and colour, number and dimension, still it is impossible for one who is not an idiot, not to approve of the person who does what he ought, and not to condemn him who does what he ought not, if in either case he acts from choice; and it is equally impossible not to heighten his approbation or disapprobation, in proportion to the idea he hath of the good or evil the man hath done, and the freedom
of

of choice with which he hath acted. As we have no occasion for reasons or arguments to support our judgement in pronouncing on the difference betwixt light and darkness, straight and crooked; so we have no occasion for reasons or arguments, but great occasion to guard against the bias of our affections, in pronouncing on the essential difference betwixt vice and virtue, or on the obvious obligations of morality; and possessed of these, we are possessed of the first principles of that science.

C H A P. III.

The same subject continued.

FROM the low and gross notions of Deity entertained by savages, and still more from the heedlessness and inattention of many among ourselves to the fullest display of divine perfection, there is ground to suspect, that men left to themselves might never attain the true knowledge of God; but this needs give no disturbance to those who can name instances in abundance, in themselves and others,
of

of not attending to many other truths equally obvious.

Nothing is more common; than to hear persons of prudent conduct acknowledging their ignorance of obvious truths to which they have not attended, and wondering at themselves for having overlooked them so long; and perhaps there are few who are not chargeable with such oversights. By not observing these and the like occurrences, which are not unfrequent, people of good understanding seem to hold for a rule, That what is not generally known, is not obvious.—But we are so constituted, as to have but a superficial knowledge of what we view imperfectly, and to know nothing at all of the plainest truths, to which we have given no attention: nor is it uncommon for persons of good eyesight to mistake a stranger for a friend, until they have viewed his features with due attention.

If men, whether savage or civilized, gaze upon the heavens and the earth like the dumb cattle, they may know as little of God as they. But we ask, whether it is possible that any one above the level of an idiot, can survey the stupendous

dous order that reigns in the universe, without having recourse to a being of absolute perfection, the author and conductor of the whole? and we affirm, it is not; it is impossible to hinder a rational being from connecting order with design, benefits with goodness, or punishments with justice; for these are the dictates of common sense. Attempts have been made in all ages to give another account of the matter; but all in vain: for if a man is not a fool indeed, he will not resolve depth of wisdom into chance or blind necessity; profusion of goodness, unmerited goodness, into malignity or selfishness; or exquisite suffering, into any other cause than justice, in a being who is above all temptation to do wrong*.

Men

* Those sufferings only which, in the nature and constitution of things, are connected with, and consequent upon, misbehaviour, are punishments in the strict and proper sense; and these alone are meant as indications of the divine justice. To account for the sufferings of infants and innocent animals, is not the province of common sense; but to expect degrees of happiness or misery, in proportion to our good or ill behaviour, under the government of an all-perfect being, is unavoidable to a man of understanding: and the connection betwixt virtue and happiness, vice and misery, which takes place at present,

Men may be inattentive to these truths, and too many chuse to be so; but it is not in their power to believe as they would, because they cannot pervert those phenomena of nature by which they are announced, nor make any considerable change in those faculties that are essential to them as rational beings.

The religious sentiments of many savages are stupid enough; but none of them have been yet found of such weak understanding, as to hesitate about the connection betwixt cause and effect. They are rather too hasty in their conclusions; and, through a precipitancy of judgment, imagine as many deities as there are phenomena. Nor need we much wonder, that they should believe the sun, and the moon, and the stars, to be animated, and almost all the elements proper objects of worship, when we ourselves show so great propensity to place that confidence

present, does not only heighten this expectation, but gives full conviction to an attentive mind, of the justice as well as wisdom of the supreme ruler. These truths may be darkened by reasoning, but have full authority from reason and common sense.

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in subordinate agents, and even in chance, which is due only to the supreme being; but have great reason to blush for ourselves, and our fellow-citizens, and for the age we live in, that so much labour must be employed in procuring a firm assent to the most obvious and important truths.

The primary truths of religion and morality are evidently on a footing with the primary truths of all the arts and sciences, and with the first principles of wise and just conduct of every kind. They must stand or fall together. If you believe the one, you must believe the other; and if you doubt of one, you must also doubt of the other; for all have the same authority. And when this authority is better understood, more revered, and felt more sensibly, than it is or can be at present, he who calls in question the being and providence of God, the essential difference betwixt vice and virtue, the punishment due to the former, and the reward due to the latter, will be thought as great an idiot, as he who calls in question the reality of matter and motion, of gravitation, or animal life, or of any the most obvious principles of prudence or common sense.

We have undoubtedly made progress in learning; but a little further proficiency will shew us, that we have not yet got clear of the mists of false science, are hardly yet conscious of our own dignity, and scarce dare to pronounce with firmness on the simple dictates of reason and common sense. *E*

Ask a celebrated philosopher, whether there is any reason for believing first principles? and he will tell you, that he knows of none; but being long accustomed to believe them, he will say, that we must believe them. Make your complaint to another philosopher of note, less heterodox than he, and he will tell you, that we are so constituted, that we must believe obvious truths; but chuses rather to have recourse to an instinctive feeling than to the authority of reason. Apply to those philosophers who are professedly orthodox, and all agree, that we must of necessity believe, and exclaim against all attempts to doubt of obvious truth; but are generally shy of founding on the simple dictates of reason, or even of naming its authority. These, you will say, are strange proceedings in men of understanding, endued with

with a power of discerning betwixt obvious truth and palpable falsity, called *Reason*, and valuing themselves on that high privilege by which their maker has distinguished them. But you are not to suppose, that the learned are altogether above the power of prejudice. When they are as much accustomed to the authority of reason as they have been to the force of reasoning, they will pay as great, and a greater, regard to the former, than is paid to the latter; and then all primary truths will be on a footing; and he who doubts of the primary truths of religion and morality, will be deemed as great a fool as he who hesitates about the axioms of the schools.

C H A P. IV.

It is a reproach to a man of sense, to have recourse to any other authority than the simple dictates of reason for the belief of primary truths.

OUR fathers complained of the free-thinkers of their day, for making human reason their oracle, and raising its

authority above that of revelation; and we, on the other hand, must complain of those of the present times, for setting aside this oracle altogether, degrading human nature, and sapping the foundation of religion and morality, by the account they make of our belief of primary truths. They appeal to the authority of reason for the justness of their procedure in deducing one truth from another; but when they arrive at first principles, they resolve our belief of them into custom, association of ideas, internal feeling, our being so constituted, a necessity of stopping somewhere, or some one necessity or other, independent of reason, they suppose, we are under of giving our assent. This, to a man of plain understanding, and unacquainted with the ways of the learned, must appear strange. Has the mathematician, or any just reasoner, the authority of reason, till he arrives at axioms, or primary truths, and does reason then desert him? One would think, on the contrary, that he has *then* the voice of reason in a more clear and authoritative manner than at any other time, and that a rational being would believe axioms, or primary truths,

more

more firmly, than any other truth he could deduce from them by rules of reasoning; and would find himself under a strict obligation to do so, on account of that reason by which he is dignified. But if reason does indeed desert a man, how shall he behave? What connection is there betwixt believing a truth, and being accustomed to think in a particular way? for may not I be accustomed to think falsely? And what connection is there betwixt the truth of a proposition, and my being so constituted as necessarily to believe it? for if reason deserts me, my constitution will probably lead me to believe falsehood as readily as truth. There may indeed be a necessity of stopping somewhere; for we cannot carry on our reasonings *ad infinitum*; but if reason does not authorise the proposition at which we stop, we are at an absolute uncertainty about its truth. These things have a strange appearance to men of plain understanding, but will not appear strange to those who are acquainted with the ways of the learned.

Mr Hume ascribes our belief of primary truths to association of ideas.—His meaning is, that we are accustomed to connect

connect cause with effect; the power in fire, for instance, to consume combustibles, with actual burning; and therefore believe that fire has actually this power. But this is a wretched account of the matter, and gives great authority to those positive fools, who, "if once wrong, " (as Pope says) must needs be always so." It also gives men a licence to create axioms at pleasure; and many do assume this power. Bigots associate ideas as they are taught; and in consequence of this association, do hold pernicious falsities for axioms. The vulgar also have many prejudices, of which they are extremely confident, through habit, custom, and association of ideas. On this hypothesis, truth and falsehood, sense and nonsense, are of no consideration in believing.

An ingenious author, dissatisfied with this hypothesis, accounts for our belief of primary truths, by our being so constituted, as makes it necessary to believe them.—But neither will this do. Our constitution is in many cases a bad test of truth. Most men are so constituted, as to believe the existence of spirits in the dark: are there, therefore, more spirits in the dark than

than in the light? An Atheist will tell you, that he is so constituted, as to pay no regard to what is said of an invifible world; or, what is worfe, he will own, that he is so constituted as to believe thefe things, but confiders this belief as a weaknefs that is both inconvenient and shameful; and therefore has recourfe to a variety of fuppositions and conjectures to relieve his mind from it. What is now to be done? All primary truths, we fhall be told, are not objects of intuition, and none of them are capable of proof by argument. But are there not truths in nature of equal evidence with thofe that are feen intuitively? Have not I as good reason to believe that I exift, that I am prefently writing, that I who am writing now am the fame perfon who a little while ago was afleep, and neither wrote nor thought; have not I as good reason for believing thefe truths, as for believing that two and three make five? And if fo, whence arifes this embarrassment? and what occafion to have recourfe to affociation of ideas, or to a law in my conftitution, or in the conftitution of nature, which forces my belief, without indicating

ting the truth of the proposition believed?

If you are asked, Why you feel pain on the sight of a pitiable object? the proper answer is, That you are so constituted: for reason, though it directs you to afford relief, does not require this pain. If you are asked an account of the preference given to brothers, sisters, and other near relations, you must have recourse to the law of nature; for reason dictates no such preference. But when you are asked, why you esteem the wise, love the good, abhor the villanous; and why you acknowledge him to be wise who acts wisely, and him to be just who does justly; or why you believe your own existence and identity? your answer is, That *reason* requires you so to do; and that you cannot do otherwise, without trespassing against that principle in your nature by which you are distinguished from idiots and the lower animals. In these, and the like cases, you have no occasion to fly to dark and ambiguous answers; because the judgement you pronounce, does not flow from any singularity in your constitution, but

but from a principle you enjoy in common with all rational beings.

Does not every one know, that human nature is made up of various and opposite principles? To say nothing of the delineation given by an apostle, which is remarkably exact and just, ought not philosophers to remember the group of animals mentioned by Plato, with a man placed in the middle, to direct, control, and check them?—Take away the man, or let him fall asleep, and human nature will assume a variety of opposite and absurd forms, in sentiment, as well as in action. To appeal then for the truth of a proposition to human nature in the general, is not fair: it is evasive; and betrays either a degree of fineness which does not suit with candour, or of ignorance which misbecomes a philosopher.—And, in one word, it is unworthy of a man of sense to have recourse to any other principle, for the belief of primary truths, than that perception of obvious truth he enjoys in common with all of the rational kind, and of which he is conscious. Whoever pretends to the understanding of a man, may sustain himself as a judge of truth, and

endued with a capacity of distinguishing betwixt obvious truth and palpable absurdity with undubitable certainty; and in this respect dignified, and (as Mr Hume well expresses it) “selected from all the other parts of the creation, to bear the image or impression of the universal creator.”

Mr Hume, in his Natural history of Religion, sets out with these words, which have not met with the regard that is due them: “As every inquiry which regards religion, is of the utmost importance, there are two questions in particular which challenge our principal attention, viz. that concerning its foundation in reason, and that concerning its origin in human nature. Happily the first question, which is the most important, admits of the most obvious, at least the clearest, solution. The whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author; and no rational inquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine theism and religion.” He concludes with these words: “The universal propensity to believe in invincible

“fible intelligent power, if not an original instinct, being at least a general attendant of human nature, it may be considered as a kind of mark or stamp, which the divine workman has set upon his work; and nothing sure can more dignify mankind, than to be thus selected from all the other parts of the creation, and to bear the image or impression of the universal creator.”

What a pity that Mr Hume did not always think in this way; or, if he did, that in accounting for our belief of primary truths, he had not recourse to the universal propensity to believe in invisible intelligent power, which, with justice, he calls the image or impression of the universal creator, and the chief dignity of human nature. But Mr Hume was carried away with the stream of false learning: and no wonder he should, while some sound believers, and good philosophers, seem shy of trusting to the simple dictates of reason, and others can hardly distinguish betwixt reason and reasoning. Nor is this offered as an apology for Mr Hume, (for no excuse can be offered for the publication of absurd and dangerous paradoxes), but to

give warning to all who philosophize on these subjects, to adhere steadily to the obvious dictates of reason and common sense.

C H A P. V.

We have the authority of reason more full and complete for the belief of primary truths, than for the belief of any truths deducible from them by the art of reasoning.

THE influence of custom, on the minds even of the learned and judicious, is so great, that numbers insist on the necessity of reasoning for evincing primary truths. They allow, that the reasoning ought to be short and simple; yet some reasoning they think must, and ought to be. But a little attention to the operations of the human mind, will be sufficient to remove this scruple.

All writers on logic set out with delineating three powers of the human mind; apprehension, judgement, and the discursive faculty; and these powers are truly distinct, and may be easily distinguished. You fix your eyes on this table; and
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by a simple act of your mind, called *ap-
prehension*, you are informed of its exist-
ence. You compare the table with the
chair in its neighbourhood; and by ano-
ther act of the mind, called *judgement*,
you pronounce the one to be higher or lar-
ger than the other. You view the quali-
ties of the wood of which the table is made,
with attention, and pronounce it to be
mahogany. You see a dog lying on the
ground, and have no doubt of his exist-
ence: you see him run hither and thither
at pleasure, and affirm that he is endued
with animal life: you observe him run
with a certain degree of velocity, and
conclude; that he can run a certain num-
ber of miles in an hour. These are the
well-known operations of the human
mind which we daily employ in the disco-
very of truth; and of which therefore we
ought to be informed with exactness; with
such exactness at least, as may prevent
our mistaking one for another, or con-
founding the office of the one with that of
the other. When you pronounce the ta-
ble to be higher or larger than the chair,
or the dog who goes hither and thither at
pleasure to be an animal, or the man with
whom

whom you converse to be a man of parts, you pass sentence by a simple act of judgement upon the objects before you; and on supposition of your being in the full and free exercise of that faculty, you have the whole force of reason in support of your judgement; but in the exercise of the discursive faculty, you proceed in another manner,

When you pronounce the wood of which this table is made to be mahogany, you must have recourse to a medium, or middle term; and on your care and exactness, in comparing the subject under consideration with this middle term, depends the justness of your conclusion. When you pronounce a dog to be an animal, you need no mean of proof, but that which arises immediately from the object before you: but when you affirm, that he will run so many miles in the hour, you must call in the assistance of a watch, or some other measurer of time, and be well assured of the justness of this medium, before you can pronounce with certainty.

The truth is, that there is always danger of mistake, when the subject on which

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we employ either our judging or our reasoning powers is complex; and the danger grows less, in proportion as the subject on which either are employed is simple and plain. But let it not be forgot, that the shortest and simplest reasoning is reasoning still; and the difference of danger betwixt reasoning and judging, is as two to one; and whoever employs the one in place of the other, in evincing primary truths, is guilty of a capital mistake.

We have already said, that it is in vain to set about the proof of the being of matter and motion, of gravitation, or any other primary truth; that we cannot add any thing to the conviction we have of these realities by any, or by all, the arts of reasoning; that we cannot find a medium, or form a just syllogism, upon such subjects; that we may assume the truths in question, as is often done, for a principle of reasoning, and so form a sophism, or have recourse by analogy to other truths not more evident, and so produce a trifling demonstration; that it is impossible to give the form of syllogism, enthymeme, inference, or any other species of reasoning, to our manner of discovering primary

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ry truths; because we proceed without the help of a middle term; and if what is already said, vol. i. p. 234. 235. 236. does not give full satisfaction, we desire any one to make the experiment, and judge for himself.

Notwithstanding the ridicule bestowed on Monf. Des Cartes, the middle term he had recourse to will be found not less philosophical and proper, if not more so, than any other that can be devised for the proof of any primary truth. By what middle term, or mean of proof, shall any one evince his existence, or personal identity? And where shall he find a medium to evince the existence of those objects around him, which he sees with his eyes, or feels with his hands? He may call his seeing or feeling a middle term, and pretend to reason from it; but we appeal to all the writers on logic, whether this can be admitted as a middle term, or that can be allowed to be reasoning? They all agree on three terms being necessary to just reasoning, and give many rules for the proper use of them; and as some regard is due to the judgement of those who have made the art of reasoning their study,

dy, we ought not to be rash in pronouncing any thing to be reasoning, until we are possessed of the three terms required by logicians, and can shew how the truth is discovered, by comparing the middle term with the two extremes. But setting aside reasoning altogether, every man of sense will affirm, that the light which he sees is light, and the stone which he feels is a stone; and (accidental disorders apart) is positive that he cannot be mistaken.

By what medium, or mean of proof, shall we evince the reality of matter and motion, the power in fire to consume combustibles, and the power in animals to move hither and thither at pleasure? General truths may be found, to which we may refer these phenomena; but will our reasonings from these general truths produce a conviction equal to what is produced in every rational mind by simple attention? or will any wise man put truths so absolutely evident to the hazard of any proof of any kind? As men of understanding, we believe, that he who does wisely is wise, and he who does justly is just; and that we ought to reverence the

just, esteem the wise, and love the benevolent. — Now, is it possible to add any thing to the conviction we have of these evident truths by the art of reasoning?

We shall defy any man, if he hath indeed the understanding of a man, to look upon the operation of fire, and doubt its having a power to consume combustibles; or on the motions of animals, and doubt their being endued with a power of action and self-determination, which does not belong to dead matter; or to give attention to the conversation and behaviour of men, and doubt of their intellectual powers and moral dispositions; or to the order and harmony of the universe, and doubt of the being and perfections of God. But if he is an acute reasoner, we cannot defy him to withhold his assent from conclusions that may be deduced from any general principles by the established rules of reasoning; because it is not in our power to deduce them in the manner that is necessary to force the assent. Setting aside mathematical demonstration, it is a question whether any reasoning on any subject can be rendered so strictly conclusive, as to preclude all doubting in a mind disposed

disposed to scepticism : on which account, all reasoning ought to be laid aside altogether, or used with great caution, in evincing primary truths. Arguments, proof, and demonstration, may contribute to beget a disposition to believe; but by all means beware of laying the stress of the cause upon them : for if you do, the first discovery that is made of a flaw in any part of your reasoning, begets a hesitation; and the communication of this discovery spreads a general scepticism, that gives great trouble to the friends of truth, and redounds in the issue to the detriment and dishonour of religion, virtue, and good sense.

We frankly allow, that the whole force of eloquence is needed to engage the attention of stupid, thoughtless, precipitate creatures, to the manifold displays of the being and perfections of God with which they are encompassed; but affirm, that he who is incapable of seeing the invisible things of God by the things he hath made, or of understanding his mind concerning the capital duties of religion, from the repeated declarations contained in his word, is incapable of conviction from arguments;

for the man labours under an invincible disorder, which you may call madness, or by any other name you judge more proper.

It is pity, after all, to have any controversy with the friends of religion upon this subject. If any chuse to say, that they infer the primary truths from the phenomena, we allow the phraseology, upon condition they keep in mind, that the inference results immediately, and unavoidably, from due attention to the object, and without the help of a middle term; or if they chuse to call such obvious and necessary deductions reasoning, we will not dispute about a word, provided they allow that such reasoning is not subject to the danger of those errors and mistakes we are liable to in every other exercise of the discursive faculty.

There are in mathematics first principles, which some mathematicians affirm to be capable of demonstration, and therefore not intitled to the rank of axioms; and which others alledge are intitled to that rank on account of the necessity every one is under of assenting to their truth on being fairly proposed; and there are in all other

other sciences, and in the whole field of nature, innumerable truths about which a man of sense cannot hesitate a moment, on their being fairly proposed, and seem on that account to be intitled to the rank of first principles, but which, to appearance at least, derive great evidence from their intimate connection with other indubitable truths. According to some, these truths ought to be admitted as axioms on the simple authority of reason; and according to others, they ought to be evinced by a species of reasoning peculiar to obvious truths. But, without quarrelling about what may or may not be called reasoning, men of judgement will agree, that the evidence is quite different from that which arises from the exercise of the discursive faculty on disputable subjects.

We have already allowed the danger of mistake in the exercise of the judging as well as of the reasoning faculty, upon complex subjects, and are sensible of the absurdity of ascribing the authority of common sense to any such judgement, and willing to confine it to subjects that are simple and obvious, and level to the capacity of every one who is endued with
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the understanding of a man. Some pretend, that all just reasoners make an appeal to common sense, not only in every step as they proceed, but in the last issue and result of the whole. But there is a mighty difference betwixt the conviction arising from a complex view of a multitude of relations and connections, however obvious in themselves, and that which arises from simple attention to one obvious truth, when fairly proposed, or when stated in comparison with its opposite absurdity : and there is a mighty difference betwixt the capacity necessary for pronouncing in the former and in the latter case.

When a lawyer pleads the cause of his client before a judge, whether he reasons, or contents himself with a fair state of the case in all its circumstances, he cannot be said to appeal to common sense, but to a discernment that is uncommon, and belongs to those only who are qualified to judge in such complex cases. But when a lawyer, or any other man, states simple truths, obvious to every one who is above the level of an idiot, he then appeals to
common

common sense, and is intitled to the belief arising from such high authority.

That any truth, or number of truths, may become objects of common sense, they must be easily and obviously perceptible to every one endued with the understanding of a man, and imperceptible to those alone who are destitute of this faculty altogether, or who, by accident or artifice, have it impaired to a degree that denominates them fools.

There is an acquired as well as a natural folly. Not only in science, but in business also, men often make fools of themselves, by affecting to be over-wise; and with these the difficulty of admitting certain obvious truths is almost as great as with born idiots: but if there is any remainder of probity and good sense, an appeal may and ought to be made to it, with a view to their being made sensible of the truth proposed, or of that abuse of their understanding which alone prevents or obstructs its reception; and whether one proceeds on the simple dictates of reason, or on inferences unavoidably arising from obvious facts, makes no difference, provided the representation of truth be so plain

plain and palpable, as either to procure assent, or fix a conviction of folly and nonsense; and the last judgement, however unpleasant, is useful, and in many cases necessary, to pave the way for that reception of obvious truth which ought never to be despaired of.

C H A P. VI.

We ought never to despair of mens giving up idle reasonings, and admitting primary truths on the authority of reason.

GIve a child or a peasant a glimpse of the sciences, and he plunges forthwith into unfathomable depths.—Clear up his difficulties, and give satisfaction to his numberless questions, and he plunges still deeper.—Shew him the connection of truths, and lay open the chain of causes and effects, and without delay he sets about the pleasant work of castle-building, and with great delight goes on to enlarge, improve, and beautify his edifice. But if he has good sense at bottom, he may, after many fruitless attempts,

tempts, be prevailed on to look to his foundation; and finding it next to none, or not sufficient to support his fabric, may be persuaded to come down to firm ground, and build with more solid materials. Every one's observation will furnish him with instances of individuals who have pursued this course; and a course not much different from it has been pursued by the generality of the learned, from the revival of letters to the present times. The various systems of orthodoxy and heterodoxy about which our ancestors disturbed the world, make up many bulky volumes; and the various surmises, conjectures, and chimerical suppositions, whereby modern sceptics have endeavoured to undermine religion, are of no inconsiderable bulk.

The progress of learning, viewed with attention, begets sentiments which one would willingly suppress, if it could be done consistently with the interest of truth. *Monf. Des Cartes*, with a generous boldness, supported by noble powers, appeared amongst the first to relieve us from the most insupportable load that ever oppressed the human faculties; but unhappily

set out with the shameful folly of demonstrating his own existence. Mr Locke, with a genius suited to the greatness of the undertaking, set himself to banish every thing false and chimerical from science; but unhappily overlooking the chief inlet of truth, alledged, that all our knowledge is derived from sensation, and from reflection on our ideas of sensation; and so laid his successors under the necessity of demonstrating truths of which no man of sense ever entertained a doubt, and which are indeed too obvious to require or admit of proof or demonstration. The unhappy effect of this hypothesis soon appeared in a writer of great merit; who plainly asserted, that we had no evidence for the reality of what we saw with our eyes, and felt with our hands; and that houses, lands, men, and horses, were no other than ideas; and that no possible proof could be brought of their existence. And Mr Hume, pursuing the same track, discovered, that we have no evidence for any or for all the laws of nature, or the author of these laws. Though, on every trial, we see heavy bodies go to the centre, we cannot, (he says), with any shew of

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of argument, infer a law of nature by which they descend. Though we daily see fire consume wood and other combustibles, we cannot from hence infer, that fire has a power to consume combustibles. Tho' we find it in our power to rise from our seats, and move from place to place, we are not thereby furnished with any satisfying evidence, that there is such a thing as power in nature. Though we perceive the difference betwixt vice and virtue as sensibly as betwixt light and darkness, sweet and bitter, we have no title from hence to conclude, that there is a difference in the nature of things betwixt vice and virtue. And, finally, though we inhabit a system replete with wisdom and goodness, and proceeding with amazing regularity from age to age, we have no ground to conclude, that there is a great, a good, and wise being, the author and conductor of the whole.

These are alarming symptoms of a decline, not only in our religious and moral sentiments, but also in our way of judging of all useful subjects, and of the principles of just conduct in particular. But let us not despair.—The literati in

France are charged with downright Atheism, and the levity of the nation gives countenance to the charge; but this folly never did, and it is hoped never will, take place in Britain. For though our writers have of late trespassed highly against the principles of good sense, and though many causes conspire in procuring a favourable reception to their extravagancies; yet it will not be easy to get the better of a national character. Let a man's understanding be ever so weak, and his tendency to irreligion ever so strong; yet if he retains but a portion of that good sense by which our people have long been distinguished, he will find himself under a necessity of admitting the belief of primary truths. He may amuse himself with the imagination, that the world did of itself jump into existence, or has been produced by blind chance, or fatal necessity; but he cannot believe it. He may argue, that there is nothing in the nature of things corresponding to our ideas of the beauty, dignity, and supreme excellence, of moral worth, and puzzle weak minds with such paradoxes, in the same manner as they are puzzled with the assertion,

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"That heat is not in the fire," nor "colour in the object;" yet, upon appealing to himself, he will find, that all this is learned nonsense. He may say to himself, and perhaps to others, that God hath no regard to the good or ill behaviour of his creatures; but there is something within him that tells him the contrary. And though he may have skill to baffle the arguments for a future state, taken from the immateriality of the human soul; yet he never will be able to clear his mind of those hopes and fears which are natural to every moral agent. His perception of primary truths may be faint and obscure; but it is real, and, if he does justice to himself, sufficient, not only to guard him against scepticism, but to prove a steady principle of wise and just conduct.

Some are blessed with organs of sight which give them a clear, strong, and steady view of objects: the sight of others is faint, obscure, and confused; but the weakest eye will take up the outlines at least, and, by repeated exercise, may gradually come to a more distinct and steady view of bulky objects, and, with proper care,

care, may attain at last as much discernment as is necessary for the common purposes of life. Common sense, like all our other powers, hath different degrees of strength in different persons. Those of masculine understanding possess it in a degree that renders it impossible for them to hesitate in pronouncing on obvious truth; and they are generally staunch believers. Others, of strong imagination, but weak judgement, do waver: and men of shattered understanding, and corrupt hearts, are capable of adopting the wildest fictions in opposition to the plainest and most important truths. Yet if there is a spark of good sense remaining, a man may be made sensible of the difference betwixt plain sense and palpable absurdity, when both are put full in his view; and if not determined to play the fool, he may be prevailed on to give up idle conceits, and proceed on the belief of primary truths. For as the worst and most vitiated palate will, by repeated trials, perceive the difference between sweet and bitter; and as the least musical ear will, by repeated attention, distinguish betwixt harmony and discord; and as the rudest savage will,
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by frequent comparison, distinguish betwixt a regular building and a confused heap of materials; so will any one above the level of an idiot, distinguish betwixt primary truths and their opposite absurdities, when both are set full in his view.

To think, that because men are born with common sense, they may, without assistance, conduct themselves by just rules, with respect to this life or the next, is the same mistake as to think, that without assistance men should reach a system of geometry, because every one is born with the principles of geometry; and all men, mechanics especially, do practise on these principles in some degree. Every one who is not an idiot, may distinguish betwixt sense and nonsense, when both are put full in his view: but most men (the learned not excepted) need to have this friendly office done them.

We will offer, then, the plain truth to mens judgement, and will demand their judgement on it. We will present them with the opposite falsity, and demand their judgement on it also. They shall have the opportunity of comparing one with

with another, and of judging which is, and which is not, agreeable to common sense, and we will require them to act the part that becomes them. We shall offer no frivolous reasons in support of obvious truth; nor will we admit futile surmises in contradiction to it; but promise, that if they act like men of sense and probity in giving the decision, they shall in time attain a firmness of faith proportioned to the honesty of their endeavours, and the degree of rationality of which they are possessed.

It is commonly thought, that the primary truths of natural religion may be had from the ancient sages.—But this is a vulgar error; for the sages of antiquity, though they have conveyed to us a great variety of the noblest thoughts, in the noblest manner, were not possessed of a complete system of natural religion; and whoever is desirous of it, or of a system of knowledge on this subject which will stand the trial of common sense, must have recourse to the scriptures, which give discoveries, not only of truths which we could not otherwise have known, but also a clear, full, and strong, display of a variety of obvious

obvious and interesting truths, which, through too much or too little thinking, have escaped the observation of mankind. To this source of truth, then, we must, and, without offence to scepticism, we hope we may, have recourse, in the same manner we would to the writings of Aristotle, Plato, or Zoroaster.

B O O K H.

Of the being of God.

C H A P. I.

The being of God is too obvious and sacred a truth to be subjected to the reasonings of men.

“**T**HERE is not (says Mr Hume) a greater number of philosophical reasonings displayed on any subject than this, to prove the existence of Deity, and refute the falsities of Atheists; and yet the most religious philosophers dispute, whether any man can be so blinded as to be a speculative Atheist. How shall we reconcile these contradictions? The knight-errants, who wandered about to clear the world of dragons and giants, never entertained the least doubt concerning the existence of these monsters.”

Religious philosophers, it must be confessed, have laid themselves open to this raillery. Convinced, as they were, that
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no man in his senses could doubt the being and perfections of God, they ought to have rested the cause of Theism on an appeal to common sense. But, in compliance with the practice of the schools, which, as Mr Locke says, had made reasoning the touchstone of truth, they would needs be tampering with arguments, and have thereby created some degree of scepticism in wrong-headed men, concerning the plainest, most interesting, and sacred truths in the world.

The inspired writers do not offer a proof of the being and perfections of God. They tell us, that the invisible things of him are clearly seen from the things which he hath made; that the heavens declare his glory, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work; that day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night teacheth knowledge. They call upon men to open their eyes, and observe that depth of wisdom, immensity of power, and profusion of goodness, which no understanding can fathom, and to which no imagination can set bounds. They expostulate with mankind on the stupidity of imagining, that he who formed the eye should not see,

that he who planted the ear should not hear, that he who endued men with understanding should not himself understand; and often reprove them for their inattention to the being, the presence, and perfections of God; but never enter into trains of reasoning to establish a truth that is too obvious to admit of any proof.

When the foolish hearts of men were darkened by the vain imaginations of those who pretended to superior degrees of understanding, God confounded the wisdom of the world, by authorising a number of illiterate persons to publish a system of truths, which had been overlooked by the vulgar, and were made a subject of dispute with the learned; but which, being made known, commend themselves to the reason, the judgement, and conscience of every one of sound understanding. To set this system full in the view of mankind, and procure the attention and regard due to it, is the business of divines and philosophers, in which they may promise themselves success; but to attempt a proof of what is too evident to admit of any, must always be attended with bad effects.

The demonstration of the being and perfections

perfections of God by the Archbishop of Cambray, is well known to the public; and every one sees, that this sublime writer, in his first part, sets the phenomena of nature in a light that conveys, and must convey, to every rational mind, the fullest conviction, with the most lively impression, of the being and perfections of Deity. But in his second part, he labours a confutation of Atheism, with a subtilty, an obscurity, and even a seeming uncertainty, of metaphysical argumentation, that is fit to stagger a weak believer, and give courage and confidence to a bold objector. Had this great and good man attempted a proof of the reality of matter and motion in the same way, his success would have been precisely the same. Truth, when fairly proposed, must give satisfaction to those who are endued with the capacity of receiving it; but all attempts to establish first principles by reasoning, must end in disappointment.

It is alledged, that our knowledge of the being and perfections of God does not, like our knowledge of vegetation, and other obvious laws of nature, arise from simple attention to the phenomena, but
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from a process of reasoning, which passes in the mind without being observed. From the knowledge we have, that works of deep design, plans of policy, for instance, of war and architecture, are begun and executed by intelligent beings of skill and ability, proportioned to the greatness of the work, it is alledged we conclude, that the formation of the universe, a work of immense perfection, must have been planned and executed by a being of wisdom, power, and goodness, exceeding our comprehension; and that if we had not this previous knowledge, we could not have reached this conclusion. But all these suppositions are injurious to the truth: for though we discover the author of nature by the same faculty by which we discover the author of any other work of design, and though the exercise of that faculty on one subject, may give us a greater facility in its exercise on another; yet our previous knowledge of one is not necessary to our judging of another. As the man who is qualified to judge of a plan of policy, can pronounce upon the ability of its author, independently of architecture, war, or any other work

work of design; so he who is qualified to judge of the combination of powers which appear in the system of nature, can pronounce upon the perfection of its author, independently of his knowledge of any other work of design; because his judgement is founded, not upon a comparison of one system with another, but on a unity of design executed by an exact adjustment of parts and combination of powers.

Some suspect, that a savage, unacquainted with works of design, would be incapable of discerning the being and perfections of God from any views he might get of the system of nature. But this is a groundless suspicion. If a man, whether savage or civilized, is of so weak understanding, as not to distinguish betwixt design and random action, he will, no doubt, be incapable of receiving information of the being and perfections of God from the phenomena of nature: but let it be considered, that the man is in a state of idiotism; for the characteristic of idiotism, as hath been shown, consists in an incapacity to distinguish betwixt chance and design. But, idiotism apart, every one, with proper assistance, will enter in-

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to works of design, and pronounce upon the ability of their author.

The supposition of a process of reasoning which passes so quickly through the mind as not to be perceived, is altogether arbitrary; and arbitrary suppositions are extremely injurious to the truth, and give birth to that multitude of chimerical hypotheses by which mankind have been misled. Hitherto a process of reasoning hath been supposed, in proof of the connection betwixt cause and effect; which gave occasion to an ingenious writer to introduce an universal scepticism, by exposing the falsity of such reasoning. It therefore remains, that we do justice to truth, by dismissing frivolous reasoning, founded on arbitrary suppositions, and betake ourselves to the exercise of that perception of obvious truth, by which we are distinguished from idiots and lower animals.

CHAP.

C H A P. II.

Too much encouragement hath been given to the cavils of sceptics, by entering into reasonings about the being of God.

WE have already seen the impropriety of establishing the belief of primary truths by arguments. The impropriety, for instance, of such reasoning as may be employed to evince the reality of gravitation, vegetation, or any other of those primary truths in nature, which result from the contemplation of the phenomena, has been already exposed: and it is fit to do the same justice to a truth equally obvious, and more important, namely, the being of God, which hath hitherto been exposed to the cavils of sceptics, by an improper application of the art of reasoning.

No process of reasoning can be employed in favour of this capital truth, that will not be found either false or frivolous. For if the premises are taken for granted, the reasoning is frivolous; or if the premises are admitted to proof, there can be

no just conclusion. The premises are these: A work that indicates design, must be ascribed to an intelligent author; the world is a work that indicates design, &c.; propositions to which any man of understanding assents on the first hearing, or from which it is not in his power to withhold his assent when he comes to a clear understanding of the terms. But if they are subjected to proof, it will not be so easy establishing their truth as is commonly thought; for this plain reason, that, like all other primary truths, they are too obvious to receive any addition to their evidence from any medium of proof, or form of argumentation.

Let us try the first proposition, which logicians call the major. A work that indicates design must be ascribed to an intelligent author. Nothing is more obviously evident, or more readily assented to by a man of sound understanding; but if a wrong-headed man chuse to ascribe this work to chance, he is not to be confuted by arguments. It is vain to tell him, that we know of no such works being produced by chance; because he will affirm, that we are not acquainted with
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all the powers of chance. You may insist on the improbability, or, if you will, the impossibility, of producing the Iliad or the Æneid, by casually jumbling the letters of the alphabet; but he will tell you, that he does not ascribe the formation of the universe to any such casualty as we are capable of producing, but to a casual revolution of atoms, immense and eternal. He will tell you, that by repeated throws of the dice, one may cast up any number called for within a given time; and therefore will insist, that any possible state of nature may result from unlimited revolutions of matter: and if he is disposed to put more confidence in the art of reasoning than in the simple dictates of reason, he will not submit.

Mr Hutchison has undertaken to demonstrate the absolute impossibility of producing any such complicated system as this world, or even a system inferior to it, by chance, on account of the infinity of opposite chances that must occur in every part to obstruct the design. And this ingenious author, it must be confessed, has gone as far as human skill can go, to make out the proof. But Mr Hutchison

was too good a philosopher to think it strict proof; and therefore contented himself with calling it almost demonstration: which is in fact giving up the cause to sceptics; for no man will think himself bound to rest in what is not altogether, but almost demonstration.

A man of sound understanding sees at once, that order results from design, and disorder from chance; and that infinite revolutions of chance, if any such thing can be supposed, would produce infinite disorder: but argumentation on this subject can have no other effect, than to put unhappy men on abusing their understanding with chimerical suppositions about the origin of the world, and to give them the boldness of maintaining absurdities, on a most important subject, in contradiction to common sense.

Our success with the minor proposition will be no better than in proof of the major. For though nothing is more evident than the order of the universe, one will have difficulty in maintaining it against a pertinacious disputant. Explain a fire-engine, or any such complicated machine, to one unacquainted with the subject, and
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he will at first be astonished, and in high admiration of the contrivance; but if he is captious, he will find fault, without your having it in your power to give him satisfaction. He will alledge, that many things have an aukward appearance, and that some things are made in so bungling a manner, as not to bespeak the hand of an artist. You may tell him, that you are not enough master of the subject to account for every thing, nor has he capacity to comprehend the whole; but he will insist upon his objections, and stand out against the truth. In this manner do ignorant and self-sufficient people object to plans of government, and to all works of design, which they do not thoroughly understand: and in the same manner do petulant wits object to the plan of providence, and even to the system of nature, and pertinaciously persist in their objections, without the possibility of being confuted by arguments.

It is easy to show them a connection of parts, and unity of design, which they cannot gainsay; but they, on the other hand, point out strange and uncouth appearances, which can as little be denied.

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You alledge, that they have no right to found any argument upon their ignorance; but they affirm, that, as disputants, they have a right to withhold their assent until they are satisfied. You tell them, that they may be deceived by appearances; but they contend, that until these appearances are cleared up, they are bound to hold their minds in suspense. It deserves notice, that sceptics, and even infidels, do not deny the primary truths, or alledge that they are altogether void of evidence, but that they have not that full evidence that is necessary to create a firm belief; and this evidence you cannot procure them by any, or by all the forms of argumentation. All they aim at is to withhold their assent; and *that* they will do; and *that*, it must be owned, they have a right to do, if the subject in question is to be determined by the rules of reasoning, and not by the authority of common sense.

You may unriddle many difficulties, and give satisfaction to several objections. You may do more: By careful inspection, you can show, to the satisfaction of the sceptic, that what appeared irregular, is regular

gular in the highest degree ; that seeming discord is harmony not understood ; and that a seeming blemish is a beauty in the works of God : but you will not silence him. You have something farther to explain, and something farther still ; and cannot give a full answer to his objections, until you explain the whole ; and that you cannot do. Good sense requires, that he should be contented with less satisfaction ; but he demands proof ; and as you have undertaken it, so you must give it without reserve or limitation.

Whether the sceptic is actuated by impertinent curiosity, a spirit of contradiction, or a yet worse principle, it must be owned, that, as a disputant, he has a right to insist in his demand ; and on being refused, to withhold his assent ; which he can do with more ease, and with a much better grace, in the course of a dispute, than he could have done, if you had submitted the truth to his judgement by a simple appeal.

It is surprising, that this inconvenience attending the method of argumentation, should have been so long overlooked by so many friends of religion, distinguished

guished by their good sense, as well as by their learning: yet any one may recollect similar instances of men of good understanding, disappointing themselves in common life, by too great eagerness to prove truths too obvious to admit of proof or demonstration.

C H A P. III.

The chief effect of analogical reasoning for the being of God is, to put the gross absurdity of the contrary supposition in its full light.

MR Hume objects to the use of analogical reasoning in proof of the being of God: and though this method of reasoning has been practised in former ages, and probably may be used in after times; yet the observation of this ingenious writer on this subject is equally intitled to notice with his other objections to primary truths: for it will not be denied, that the universe is a singularity that cannot be reduced to any genus with which we are acquainted; and, therefore, that we have not access to reason from works
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of art to the formation of the universe, as we draw inferences from one species with which we are acquainted, to another which belongs to the same genus.

Observing, that great works of all kinds are planned and executed by a being of ability proportioned to the greatness of the work, men conclude, that the universe, which surpasses all other works of design that we know or can imagine, must have for its author a being of inconceivable power and wisdom; and pronounce all those unreasonable who hesitate in admitting this truth. But it is not fit to put this capital truth on the issue of this reasoning; because, by the rules of strict reasoning, a sceptic will bar you of the conclusion, and so confirm himself in his disbelief or doubt of the truth. Your reasoning, therefore, if you put the cause on that issue, must be strictly conclusive, otherwise you will lose the cause.

Notwithstanding all the instances we may produce of works of design proceeding from intelligence, and though no instance can be found of any such work proceeding from any other cause, still there may be room to suppose the possibi-

lity of the thing, if the supposition were at all consistent with common sense. Our adversaries, if not overawed by that authority, will make no scruple of answering, That we do not know all the possible causes of producing the most extraordinary effects; and we, if unsupported by common sense, would give place to the objection; but common sense gives an immediate check to all such suppositions.

Cicero among the ancients, and Fene-
lon and Tillotson among the moderns,
have given us the analogical reasoning in
all its strength; but to a judge of discern-
ment, the conviction will be found to a-
rise, not from the strength of the reason-
ing, but from the secret imperceptible in-
fluence of common sense. To this pur-
pose, it is worthy of notice, that the Eng-
lish Archbishop is the person who does
full justice to the subject. Whether from
the direction of his judgement, which was
eminently good, or from that rich vein of
wit and humour by which he was distin-
guished, he has put the whole controver-
sy in its true light. Speaking of Hen-
ry VII.'s chapel at Westminster, he hath
these words: "Upon a time, as tales u-
sually

fuallly begin, the materials of that building, the stones, mortar, timber, iron, lead, and glafs, happily met together, and very fortunately ranged themselves into that delicate order in which we see them now so closely compacted, that it must be a very great chance that parts them again. What would the world think of a man who should advance such an opinion as this, and write a book for it?" This indeed is irresistible. He must be void of all understanding, who can for a moment admit any such supposition with respect to a regular building; and he must be void of all ingenuity, who would have recourse to suppositions with respect to the formation of the universe, which any man of sense would be ashamed to apply to a common building; and whatever might be the success of such reasoning with professed disputants, we may safely affirm, that if justice is done to the subject, every man of sound understanding will be forced to admit the being of God, from the apparent absurdity and flat nonsense of the contrary supposition.

The improper, and I must be allowed to say the unworthy, treatment given to this

capital truth, by the learned, is wholly owing to their not adverting duly to the quickness, clearness, and indubitable certainty, with which a man of sense pronounces on the difference betwixt design and random action; which therefore will deserve to come under particular consideration.

C H A P. IV.

Any one above the level of an idiot, may see the invisible perfections of God from the visible harmony of the universe.

Nothing is more obvious, more quickly perceived, or more familiarly known, than the difference betwixt design and no design. When a careless passenger is hurt by a stone thrown at random by a mason, all agree, that he is hurt by accident. No man imputes the action to the mason, because he did not design it. Every one imputes it to chance; that is, to an exertion of power without design. When the cards are fairly shuffled, every player gets a hand by chance; and they who get bad hands have no complaint but

but of chance. If, instead of shuffling the cards fairly, the dealer should pack them, he who gets a bad hand finds himself injured, and complains, not of chance, but of him who gave him the bad hand with design.

The difference and opposition betwixt chance and design is so obviously perceptible, that none but mere children can hesitate about it; and they too begin to perceive it with the first dawn of rationality. As soon as children pass from the animal into the rational state, and begin to be entertained with something else than what strikes their fancy, or gratifies their palate, they study works of design, and take high delight in employing their little abilities in such as are within their reach; and, what is common, and worthy of notice, they also take delight in demolishing their structures, and in contemplating the disorder into which they have thrown their materials; thus early acquainting themselves with the distinction betwixt design and random action, and the different effect and operation of both, viewing the one with delightful admiration, and the other with mirthful surprise.

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Nor is this the business only of our younger days, but of our whole life. For the great exercise and chief employment of all men, from the king on the throne to the peasant on the dunghill, is to form, and execute, and enjoy plans of conduct, and works of design. Certain portions of time must be allotted to animal enjoyment in common with lower animals; but the chief care, the great anxiety, the toil and the time of all, not excepting the meanest and lowest of mankind, is, to gratify perceptions and sensations of a higher order; from the gratification of which, and not of our animal affections, we derive the enjoyment of life.

Let any one recollect the variety of examples of this kind which occur to his observation, and then say, whether he can suppose a rational being, savage or civilized, who is incapable of entering into works of design, and of distinguishing them from the effects of chance or random action.

The powers of the rational mind, like all our other powers, are in different degrees in different persons. Some, through the heat and hurry of a disordered imagination,

nation, are apt to be too quick in suspecting design where it does not appear. Others, through coldness of imagination, and sluggishness of thought, do not perceive it where it is apparent. But if there is a visible connection and combination of power, motion, and action, in promoting any one purpose, there design will be acknowledged, and distinguished from chance, its opposite, by every one who is in the full exercise of his rational powers. Where the combination is doubtful, there is room for hesitation, conjecture, and mistake; and in this case, people may be imposed on by those of superior capacity. Yet even in this case, it takes a great stretch of thought to make accident pass for design, or design for accident, with the weakest understanding.

There is nothing in which mankind exert more sagacity, or steadiness of judgment, than in pronouncing upon these opposite phenomena. If the resemblance to works of design be faint, as are the figures of men and animals which appear in the clouds, they have no difficulty in ascribing them to chance. But if the resemblance

semblance is exact, as are the figures of flies, fish-bones, and fish, to be found in marble and amber, they will rather have recourse to any other hypothesis, than suppose, that such perfect works could be formed by a casual concurrence of atoms. Now, is it to be imagined, that they who pronounce with such accuracy and firmness on subjects such as these, can be at a loss about the origin of the universe? that they who scruple to ascribe the formation of a fish-bone, a fly, or any single animal, to a casual concurrence of atoms, should resolve that variety of animals which inhabit the system, with the system itself, so admirably fitted for their accommodation, to any such cause, or to any other than the contrivance of a wise, powerful, and gracious being?

We have too good reason to suspect men of telling lies, or talking deceitfully, on all subjects; but it is impossible for one who is not delirious to entertain a serious doubt of the being and perfections of the author of nature, if he do justice to himself. It is easy for the mind to feign another account of things, as it is easy to figure to ourselves scenes which never existed, or

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can exist, and which have not the least resemblance to the truth of things: but if a man's understanding is not crazed, he will not take these fictions for realities; nor will he endeavour to make them pass for such, without a determined purpose of imposing on himself. The most common, and indeed the most effectual, way of escaping from primary truths, is by employing our thoughts so much upon other objects, as, in a manner, to forget and lose sight of their evidence: but that is a poor expedient, resembling the practice of little children, who cover their heads, that they may avoid the sight of objects from which they know they cannot fly.

C H A P. V.

A man of sense will rest in the belief of one God, till he sees ground to suspect that more than one exist.

THE over-zealous friends of religion, not contented with proving by arguments the being and perfections of God, have been accustomed to prove, that there

is no other God but one; which is extremely absurd. For, to say nothing of their acting against the rules of just reasoning, by taking upon them the proof of a negative, they ought, at least, before they offer any satisfaction on the subject, to have inquired, whether, in our enlightened age, any man in his senses suspects that more gods than one exist, and on what this suspicion is founded. For the condescension due to the ignorance, weakness, and mistakes of men, ought not to be extended to wilful folly; nor ought we to give encouragement to chimerical suppositions, or disingenuous pretences of scepticism.

You have got acquainted with some valuable work, the Spirit of Laws, for instance, and in a circle of friends express your esteem of the industry, the judgment, and genius, of the author; but are interrupted by some impertinent reasoner, who tells you, that you are not certain whether this work is to be ascribed to one or more authors. You pause, and ask him, whether he knows of any other author than the Baron de Montesquieu, or whether he finds any thing in the work that

that leads him to think of another? And if he say he does not, you go on with the praises of Montesquieu, without minding his objection. In the same manner, we proceed on all other subjects, except religion; against which mankind have been so long indulged the liberty of offering the most futile surmises.

As soon as a man of sense gets the idea of a regular work, or plan of wise conduct, he has immediate recourse to an intelligent being, of ability adequate to the effect; nor will he, but on due information, and proper evidence, admit of an associate; because a work of design indicates one, and but one author, to a sound understanding. The work itself may give occasion for the supposition of a variety of subordinate agents; but, on that supposition, the mind always fixes on and rests in one author only. If you are well informed, that your watch is the work, not of one, but of a number of artists, you do well to believe it: but that is no reason for my judging so of my watch; though I knew that the different parts were made by different workmen. The same may be said of a palace, a ship, a battle or a siege,

or any other work of design. Whether we may not suppose a community, conspiring with such perfect unanimity in the production of some great work, that the honour shall not be due to one individual more than another, we will leave to the discussion of those who delight in such questions; but the subject under consideration here, is not what men may conceive, but what they will believe; and we affirm, that, without good evidence to the contrary, common sense will always rest in the belief of that single author pointed out by the phenomena; and that on all subjects it is the province of common sense to banish chimerical suppositions, and rest in the belief of realities, pointed out by the works of nature or art. And if proper care is not had to give full exercise to this privilege of our rational nature, there is an end of all certainty; we are immediately in fairy-land, and exposed to all the dreams and delusions of false learning.

This way of thinking is so natural and just, and so consonant to the reason of men, that even they who, becoming vain in their imaginations, and whose foolish hearts were darkened to a degree that filled
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heaven and earth with a rabble of deities, still had recourse to one, the greatest and the best, the father of gods and men. Through fear, through flattery, and through weak credulity, they adopted a multiplicity of inferior deities: but through the force of that faculty which is characteristical of rationality, they still settled in one first cause and supreme ruler. And though it is true, that they sacrilegiously transferred that worship and honour to inferior beings, which is due only to the supreme, (as we are too prone to pay that regard to the laws of nature, and even to a weak mortal, which is due only to God); yet still it may be questioned, whether any people was ever so depraved, or besotted, as to lose sight of one supreme being: or, if any such are to be found, we presume no man of sense would propose any other method of setting them right, than by pointing out that admirable harmony, and unity of design, which shine forth so illustriously from the face of nature.

When the nations revolted from God, and followed after vanities, it pleased him to interpose, and by many signs and wonders,

wonders, repeated from age to age, to preserve the knowledge and worship of himself in one nation, till that great light appeared, so often foretold, and so long expected, which has banished polytheism, and established the belief and worship of one God only. And shall we now, in the face of this light, go about to establish the belief of this doctrine by metaphysical arguments? We who complain so much of the licentiousness of sceptics, shall we wantonly attempt a proof of a truth of which no man of sense entertains a serious doubt?

The disciples of Manes were intitled to satisfaction, because they founded on realities; but it is below the dignity of a divine or philosopher to fight with chimeras. These ancient heretics had not the boldness of modern theorists, who scruple not to resolve natural and moral evil into the divine will; but, from the same aversion which all guilty persons have of bringing the charge home to themselves, they fancied themselves under the necessity of having recourse to two gods, the authors of all that is good or evil in the world. This gross error is, however, long since extinct;
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and the friends of religion can be under no obligation to prove the unity of God, till at least some one appear, who can say with a good conscience, that he suspects that there are more than one to whom he owes that worship and obedience which is due in return for his being and preservation, and till he assign some plausible reason for this suspicion.

BOOK

BOOK III.

Of the Attributes of God.

CHAPTER I.

To acknowledge the being, and dispute the attributes of God, betrays great stupidity, or gross prevarication.

IT is impossible to believe the being of God, and be ignorant of his attributes: for if, on the testimony of the phenomena of nature, we admit the one, we must, on the same testimony, admit the other; and if these phenomena give any information at all, they must inform us of both. The essence of God, as indeed the essence of all beings whatever, is hid from us; and all that we know of any being, is certain powers or attributes which we hold to be essential to that being. There are certain properties essential to timber, to stone, to metals, with which we are acquainted; and this is all we

we know of the subject. There are qualities, powers, and properties, essential to vegetables, to animals, and to rational beings; and our knowledge of these makes up all the knowledge we have of such beings: And, in like manner, the notices we have of the powers and perfections of the supreme being make up all the knowledge we have, or can have, of him; and if the phenomena of nature give us any ideas at all, they must, as has been said, give us an idea of the attributes of God.

We acknowledge, that it is impossible to avoid the idea of God when we look on the phenomena of nature; but if we do not content ourselves with words without meaning, we must, at the same time, acknowledge, that it is impossible for us to form any conception of the immense system of nature, without an idea of the immensity of his power who made and upholds it; that it is impossible to trace the endless connection and combination of causes conspiring to one great design, without having an idea of the unfathomable depth of the divine wisdom; that it is impossible to survey the multitude of living creatures he hath brought into be-

ing, which he upholds in being, and protects from danger, and for whom he makes continual and bountiful supplies, without acknowledging his immense benevolence and parental care. And when we recollect the various sufferings of body and mind, which he hath connected with, and made consequent upon, almost every deviation from moral rectitude, even in this life, and the natural dread which every guilty person has of a more exact retribution in another state, it is impossible for us to avoid an idea of his tremendous justice: for though a full display of the justice of God is not to be expected till the scene is finished, and moral agents are ripe for judgement; yet we have, from the constitution of things, sufficient information of this attribute also; and such, upon the whole, as renders all inexcusable who do not pay the acknowledgements to God which are his due.

A savage, who runs through the woods in pursuit of his game, or in pursuit of his enemy, without looking further, may know little of the perfections, though he acknowledge the being of God. Perhaps

a few of the lower class of mankind among ourselves, who gaze on the heavens and the earth like the dumb cattle, and perhaps not a few in high rank, whose attention is wholly employed in acquiring, improving, and enjoying, a great fortune, may have the same imperfect, faint, obscure idea of God with the most ignorant savage: but all such ignorance is utterly inexcusable; because the invisible things of God, as the scripture speaks, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; and because the heavens and the earth, the seas, and the air, the fire, the hail, and the snow, do publish and proclaim the perfections of their author to every intelligent being.

Ignorance of God, and unacquaintance with his perfections, is more unpardonable in this than in any other age; because we are furnished with a variety of excellent writers, who, from the phenomena of nature, have pointed out what we are concerned to know and attend to, with a clearness and strength that gives high satisfaction. Show a clock or a watch to a savage, and he is barely astonished; acquaint him with the use of these

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machines,

machines, and he acknowledges the skill of the artist; give him such a view of the connection and combination of parts as he is capable of, and in proportion to his idea of the machinery is his admiration of the ability of the artist. In like manner, if the most ignorant, thoughtless, and stupid of the human race, who is not an idiot, will peruse, with moderate attention, the works of Derham, Ray, or the Display of Nature by the Abbé de Pluche, he will have not only a perception, but a feeling both of the being and perfections of God. Or if any man grudges the trouble of looking into books, or is afraid of being imposed on by the address of skilful writers, let him but look around him with some degree of attention to a few undoubted facts; the regular succession of day and night, of seed-time and harvest; the regular succession of animals, with parts and powers suited to their way of life; the exact proportion observed in the birth of males and females; the exact and regular supply of feeds and plants for their support and nourishment; the exact position of the heavenly bodies, with their constant and regular revolutions

tions from age to age : — let him turn his attention to these, and a multitude of the like facts, exposed to obvious observation, and then tell what he thinks of the power, the wisdom, and parental care of the author of nature. For the business here is not to reason, but to judge.

Men of taste and judgement look into Cicero and Demosthenes, and pronounce them orators ; they look into Homer and Virgil, and are transported with their inventive and creative powers ; but cannot, it would seem, discern the perfections of God from his works. They go abroad, and, with deep attention, examine the remains of ancient sculpture, painting, and architecture, and are full of the praises of the artists ; but overlook the structure of the universe, and pretend to be ignorant of the perfections of its author. From the facts recorded of Lycurgus, Solon, and Numa Pompilius, they allow them to be great statesmen, and wise legislators ; but they hesitate about the government of the supreme ruler. All, with one voice, proclaim Sir Isaac Newton to be almost divine, for having given us a clear consistent account of the planetary system ; but
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do not acknowledge the absolute perfection of him who formed the spheres, and governs their motions. This is a proceeding so unfair and unjust, as comes nothing short of downright Atheism; and will undoubtedly cover those who are chargeable with it with shame and confusion, at that tremendous period, when the honour of the Divine Majesty will be vindicated before angels, devils, and men.

We cannot see God with our eyes, or hear him with our ears, or feel his essence by our external organs; neither do we hear, or see, or feel, any of the living beings with which we are acquainted, whether rational or irrational: but as from the words, the looks, the gestures, and various actions of animals, we have a clear exhibition of those powers of which they are possessed, and as from the regular operation of the laws of nature, we have undoubted information of the existence of laws, which we do not, and cannot perceive by our senses; so from the works of God, we have a distinct, clear, and full manifestation of his perfections; and cannot assent in the one case, and hesitate in the other, without incurring the guilt of
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gross prevarication. And in vain shall we plead the immensity of the object, or the weakness of our faculties, in excuse of our infidelity; for that excuse is frivolous. Because the direct view of the sun dazzles our sight, and compels us to use a medium which breaks the force of its rays, is there any ground from hence to doubt of the existence of this luminary, or of the splendor wherewith it is encompassed?

Lord Bolingbroke, with great appearance of pious humility, has taken upon him to dissuade mankind from entertaining any idea of the moral perfections and moral government of God; and, with no less appearance of pious zeal, has pronounced a severe sentence on all divines and philosophers, from Plato to Dr Clarke, who maintain such doctrines: but his Lordship had the rashness to write four volumes on a subject which he had not duly considered, and therefore did not understand: for though he appears to be ignorant of it, it is undoubtedly true, that the inadequate knowledge we have of any subject, is as real knowledge as that which is adequate. The knowledge which a child of three years of age has of the
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person of its mother, is as real, as the knowledge which the same child has of the same object at thirteen years of age; and the knowledge at that age is as real, as the knowledge attained at the age of twenty-three, which takes in all the peculiarities of shape, complexion, and features; and may on that account be called adequate.

Divines and philosophers have not always observed the caution and modest circumspection which is fit, in their reasonings about the divine nature and perfections: and perhaps all reasoning on this subject ought to be dismissed, and all our ideas of the attributes of God ought to be derived immediately from the simple testimony of the phenomena, and the express declarations of scripture; for then our ideas, however inadequate and imperfect, will always be true; or if they are attended with any degree of mistake, they will be such, however, as suit our state, and answer the end of our existence. The ideas we have at present of God, come as far short of the ideas we shall have in a more perfect state of existence, as the knowledge a child of three years of age has

has of its parents, comes short of what it will have at thirteen. And the ideas we shall attain of God in the first stage of our existence in a future state, will probably come short of the ideas we shall attain in a few centuries following; and in all probability, our faculties will unfold themselves, and our views of God, and his adorable perfections, will, to our unspeakable joy, be enlarged and improved through all the periods of our existence. In the mean time, let us not be so injurious to our maker, or to ourselves, as to deny our having any knowledge of his attributes, because we cannot comprehend them, or because we have not that view of the object which we may have hereafter; for as young children have sufficient knowledge of their parents to answer all their purposes; so we know enough of God to fear, and to love him, to trust and obey him. This is philosophy; and this is common sense.

By neglecting those powers which distinguish us from inferior animals, we may sink into a state of ignorance and insensibility little different from theirs; and by wantonly indulging vain imagina-

tions in opposition to obvious truth, we may run into absurdities more pernicious than the ignorance of savages: but if we will act the part which becomes us, and is incumbent on us, we may attain to as clear and distinct perceptions and feelings of the perfections of God, by the faculty which distinguishes us from the lower animals, as we have of other objects, by the faculties we enjoy in common with them; and the more we give exercise to our nobler powers, they grow the more in strength and quickness, and give us still truer, clearer, and stronger perceptions and feelings of primary truths, till they at length become the governing principle of our conduct.

C H A P. II.

The experience men have of the goodness and justice of God, renders all hesitation about these attributes utterly inexcusable.

Surrounded, as we are, with monuments of the justice and goodness of God, with what face can we hesitate, or plead the want of evidence? Men may refuse

refuse to come to the light, or shut their eyes upon it; but if they will employ the probity and good sense wherewith they are endued, on occurrences which appear every day, and every hour, they shall find it impossible to account for the blessings of life, without having recourse to the goodness, or the evils of life without having recourse to the justice, of God.

That we, and numberless other creatures, are possessed of a variety of blessings which make the happiness of our lives, is a fact that will not be disputed; and that the greatest part of these blessings are derived, not from our own skill or industry, but from the constitution of nature, and the bounty of its author, is another fact which can as little be disputed. Now, to what shall we ascribe this bounty in the author of nature? Was he under any necessity of conferring these favours upon us? He was completely perfect and blessed before we came into existence, and would be perfect and happy though we were reduced to our primitive nothing. We will not dare to suspect him of bestowing favours with an insidious design: and as little can

we suspect him of selfishness ; for how can he who gave being to all things, and stands in need of nothing, be suspected of malice or selfishness ? If, then, we cannot suspect him of insidious or selfish views, and know that he was under no necessity of making this world, and furnishing it as he has done, what account shall we make of what we feel in ourselves, and see in such an immense variety of creatures ? Why did he give us existence, and why has he endued us with those desires and capacities by which we are distinguished ? and why has he presented us with so great a variety of objects to fill those capacities, and satisfy those desires ? We may avoid seeing the truth, and be unwilling to own it : and no wonder we should ; for when we think of what he has done for us, and the undutiful returns we have made to him, we must be filled with shame and confusion : but were our hearts as cold as ice, and as hard as adamant, we shall be forced to own, that our being, with all the blessings attending it, can flow from no other source than a delight the Deity has in communicating happiness to his creatures. And if indeed he
delights

delights in communicating happiness, can we doubt his being good? And if we see happiness communicated in a variety of forms, beyond what we are able to conceive, and have reason to believe that it is communicated through all the boundless regions of space, beyond our comprehension, and probably beyond the comprehension of all created intelligence; and if we ourselves feel the effects of this universal bounty; can we be insensible of the obligations we are under to the divine goodness? And shall we indulge futile surmises of false philosophy, to the prejudice of our great benefactor? Is it wisdom, is it gratitude, or is it good sense, to hesitate about the goodness of God?

There are evils in life, as well as blessings; and as the latter bear witness to the goodness, so do the former bear witness to the justice, of God. It is easy to resolve blessings into benevolence; but if you set aside malice, caprice, and wickedness, which, in the government of God, must be set aside, it will be impossible to account for the evils of life without having recourse to his justice. In the disposal of favours, you ought to believe, that
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the divine benevolence is regulated by wisdom; but in permitting or inflicting evils, you must believe, that he has a strict regard to justice; and cannot, without heinous impiety, suppose the least degree of pain or misery that does not flow from this attribute; and therefore, whether you incline it or not, you are bound to acknowledge the justice of God in every instance of pain or misery you see in others, or feel in yourself*.

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* I have already declined accounting for the sufferings of infants, and inferior animals, because the subject does not fall within the sphere of common sense. They who satisfy themselves with a mere hypothesis, may, if they will, suppose another state of existence, in which animals shall be fully compensated for their undeserved sufferings, while we content ourselves with affirming what we know. For ought we know to the contrary, the sufferings of innocent animals may be strictly due to the system of which they make a part, and may be compensated and overpaid by benefits derived from the same system; but without a revelation, or some data in nature to which we have not access, it is impossible to show how the sufferings of mere animals can be compensated, or should be due to the system in strict justice: nor is it possible to trace the justice of many dispensations of Providence even towards moral agents. — But this does not hinder us from accounting for the well-deserved sufferings of many guilty persons within our knowledge, or adhering to the general position, That it is impossible there should be any suffering of any kind, under a perfect government, that

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You may be at a loss about many dispensations of the divine providence; and no wonder you should: but whether you can or cannot trace this or the other act of the divine government, you are bound to pronounce it just; because it is not in your power to conceive, that the supreme ruler should, on any consideration, be under a temptation to do otherwise. This acknowledgement you owe to inferior beings, and much more to God. Should a man's conduct have no appearance of justice, or should it even have a strong appearance of the contrary; yet if you know and are well assured of the uprightness of his dispositions, and see no temptation he has in the present case to do wrong, you are bound to suppose, that he has conducted himself by rules of justice which you cannot assign: but the obligation becomes infinitely stronger in judging of the

is not due in strict justice. — To pretend to knowledge we have not, is silly; — and to dissemble the knowledge we have, is disingenuous. On this account, we may decline accounting for the sufferings of innocent animals; but must resolve the well-deserved sufferings of moral agents into the justice of God.

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divine administration; because a just man may deviate from the rules of justice through ignorance or weakness, but it is impossible that the supreme being should.

Mankind, in all ages, have made loud and bitter complaints of the unequal distribution of good and evil, and especially of the triumph of vice and wickedness over justice and piety: and on some occasions the wise and the good have joined in the cry, but always with a declared reservation of the absolute rectitude of the supreme ruler. Some of the learned have supposed a pre-existent state of trial, to account for the unavoidable evils to which the human race is subjected; and all men, learned and unlearned, have had recourse to a future state of retribution, to redress the evils of this life; and perhaps the philosophers of our day are the only persons who have had the inconsiderate temerity of accounting for the evils we feel and fear, without having recourse to the justice of God.

Our later writers have given us plain enough hints of embarrassments arising from the nature and constitution of things, which

which boundless wisdom and power could not surmount; but in so doing have trespassed, not only on the principles of sound philosophy, but of common sense: for it is nonsense to talk of difficulties and imbarassments arising from a constitution of things to which the supreme being gave existence of free choice. Limited rulers may, for preserving the peace and order of society, be sometimes laid under the necessity of treating their subjects with greater severity than otherwise they would chuse; but no such necessity can take place in the divine administration: nor are we at liberty to figure difficulties and imbarassments of which we are incompetent judges, when we may account for all events by the absolute perfections of the divine nature, and rectitude of the divine will. All are agreed in the impossibility that the Deity should counteract his own essential perfections in the formation or execution of his plan; and therefore the most distant hints, or obscure surmises, of his having framed a constitution of things which laid him under a necessity of treating his subjects improperly, or of permitting or inflicting any sufferings of any kind

which were not strictly due, ought to be rejected, as unphilosophical, blasphemous, and abominable.

It is worthy of notice, that the Christian revelation gives complete satisfaction on this subject, by informing us of a plan of government, in which wisdom, justice, and goodness, have full scope, and in which every act of goodness is an act of justice, in consequence of the interposition of one who has merited for himself and others :—A person, to wit, of highest dignity, who, by a course of unparalleled obedience, has merited, in the strict sense of the word, favours of various kinds for his adherents, which, in no consistency with wisdom, equity, or justice, could otherwise be conferred upon them.

C H A P. III.

The little sense men have of the goodness and justice of God must be imputed to the badness of their hearts.

IT must be owned, that we have not the same quick and clear perception of the goodness and justice, which we have
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have of the wisdom and power, of God, for a reason that is little to our honour, namely, that our hearts are not so good as our understanding. If a man has understanding but one degree above the level of an idiot, it is not in his power to survey the harmony of the universe, without perceiving the power and wisdom of him who conducts and upholds the whole: but some degree of goodness of heart appears necessary to just ideas of divine goodness; and one cannot have true views of the justice of God, without being possessed of this quality in some degree. But bad as our hearts may be, God has not left himself without a witness to his adorable perfections: for if we look into the bottom of our minds, we shall find a perception, with a feeling too, in some degree, both of the goodness and justice of God.

Your servant, whom you have raised from indigency to creditable circumstances, appears insensible of your goodness: Because he belongs to your family, he looks upon all you have done for him as due; and because you have not done all he expected, and perhaps because you have done more for others than for him,

he makes light of all your favours, puts himself to no trouble to please you, and makes no scruple of offending you; hardly behaves with decency in your presence; and in your absence, and among his fellow-servants, takes the liberty of speaking and acting against your honour and interest. You have it in your power to reduce him to beggary and disgrace; but do it not, and are unwilling to do it. You overlook his ingratitude, and continue to do him favours; but he is the more emboldened in his insolence and ingratitude. He knows that you can punish him as he deserves; but believes that you are too good to do it. Let no man say, that this is a fictitious character; for there are not wanting instances of such baseness towards men; and this is the well-known behaviour of multitudes towards Almighty God. Now, we appeal to any disinterested person, who has any degree of goodness and probity, and defy him to look on this character without a detestation proportioned to the probity and good sense of which he is possessed; and if he will bring the case home to himself, he will find, by the same rules of
judging,

judging, the monstrous ingratitude of admitting frivolous objections to the goodness of God, or behaving towards him as if he had received no favours: and this judgement he ought to pronounce, for to this judgement he will be brought at last. When those passions which at present blind his judgement, and corrupt his heart, are no more, he shall see the truth in this very light. He will both see and feel it, to his unspeakable consternation.

It is worthy of notice, that the generality of men, even of bad men, have more distinct, clear, and steady views, of the justice than of the goodness of God. Their ideas of divine goodness are indeterminate, vague, and indeed in contradiction to sense and reason: but their ideas of the other attribute are precise and determinate; for as they are persuaded, that God will not exceed the bounds of demerit in his punishments, so they expect, or at least they dread, a treatment corresponding to that standard. You will say, that their ideas of divine justice arise from fear. True. But the fear of what? The fear of punishment. And what is the

the fear of punishment? It is the fear of evil deserved; a fear which, in spite of their utmost endeavours, it is impossible to banish from their hearts. Enthusiasm on the one hand, and libertine reasoning on the other, has done much to weaken the fears of bad men; but to extinguish the sense of demerit, and of evil connected with it, or consequent upon it, is utterly impossible. The experiment has been tried a thousand times, and will be tried as long as there are bad men in the world; but with no success, or with none that is answerable to the labour bestowed. Even the presumption and boldness raised by habits of vice and impiety, are but temporary, like those raised by drunkenness or madness, or any other perversion of the rational faculties: for whenever the man comes to himself, he sees his danger, bewails his folly, is forced to pass sentence upon himself, or to acknowledge the justice of the divine government.

If there is any truth in what is commonly told of the intrepid composure of upright men in scenes of danger, or of the consternation and terror which frequently seizes bad men on these occasions,

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we must think, that a connection betwixt guilt and punishment, innocence and safety, is inseparable from the rational soul. Men think it a reproach on their understandings to doubt of the being of God, or even to hesitate about the immensity of that power and wisdom which upholds and governs the system of nature; but if they judge right, they ought to think it not less shameful to hesitate about the goodness or justice of God; for to think, that a being of absolute perfection should love a bad man, or not love a good man, is a flat contradiction to that rationality on which we value ourselves. And further, men ought to be more careful to form just ideas of these than of any other of the divine attributes; because false or injurious notions of the goodness or justice of God, are more offensive to him, and hurtful to ourselves, than any other falsities we admit into our minds. Errors of this kind, voluntarily persisted in, appear to be unpardonable; at least they are such as we cannot easily forgive in ourselves, and cannot easily expect will be forgiven by God.

C H A P. IV.

It is impossible to conceive, that a being of absolute perfection should do wrong, or should not, in all cases, do what is right and fit to be done.

IF one has business of consequence to transact with any person, or depends on his friendship, he will be desirous of all the information he can get of his capacity, disposition, and principles; but, above all, will be anxious to know his leading principle; because that constitutes his character, and by it he will chiefly govern himself. In like manner, it concerns us much to give attention to all the discoveries we have of the divine attributes; but to be in a particular manner attentive to the rectitude of the divine will; because by it, and by it alone, we can regulate our expectations with certainty. The immense goodness and parental affection of God give great hopes; but his irreconcilable abhorrence of moral evil creates equal fears to such imperfect beings as we are; and, agitated

agitated alternately by these hopes and fears, we should be mightily disturbed and confounded; if the absolute rectitude of the divine will did not afford a solid ground of encouragement to all of upright hearts, and to all who are conscious to themselves of good intentions: and of this attribute we have the utmost assurance, not only from its being almost perpetually insisted on in the scriptures, but from the impossibility of entertaining the least doubt or suspicion concerning it.

It is extremely difficult to conceive, that an intelligent being, even of limited capacity, should do wrong of free choice; and this difficulty has so much weight with many learned men, as to persuade them, that moral evil must always be the effect of some unavoidable mistake, or some irresistible impulse on the will: and they, on the other hand, who maintain the freedom of man's will, are forced to own, that the faulty conduct of mankind is absolutely unaccountable; and such as could not be expected or believed, if it had not been seen and felt. If then we judge in this manner of inferior beings, what must our judgement be of the su-

preme, but that, in all cases, he doth what is fit and right; that iniquity must be far from him; and that his will must be the only perfect standard of rectitude?

The man of the best understanding, and soundest judgement, may, in some particular cases, overlook the plainest obligations, through indolence and inattention, or through precipitancy of thought; he who has the firmest attachment to truth and justice, may not, in every competition with other interests, give full exertion to his good principles; and the man of the greatest fortitude, and firmness of mind, may not be able, in many cases, to withstand the blind impulse of his passions: and this makes an easy account of the deviations of limited beings. But none of these defects can have place with him whose understanding is infinite, and whose power is without controul; whose judgement in all things is according to truth, and whose will is irresistible. We must therefore, in contradiction to all appearances, and to the foolish opinions of the world, learned and unlearned, and to the foolish suggestions of our own hearts, adhere to this capital truth, that in all cases

cases whatever, he always does what is right and fit to be done; governs all events, and treats all subordinate beings, by the rules of the most perfect wisdom, justice, and goodness.

The disorders which appear in this life, and especially the triumph of vice over virtue, which is not uncommon, have led all the world to think of another state, in which there will be a distribution more just and equal, and more suited to the ideas we entertain of the supreme ruler; of which the connection between virtue and happiness, vice and misery, which prevails upon the whole even in this life, may be considered as a presage and forerunner. For though modest inquirers will allow, that we are not competent judges of the œconomy of God; yet they may, with reason, maintain, and will not depart from it, that he will redress the evils which prevail at present, put an end to the triumph of the wicked, and reward the services of the just, and treat all his subjects by the most perfect rules of wisdom, justice, and goodness. And though curious men have bewildered themselves with vain conjectures about a future state

of existence; yet all who judge by the rectitude of the divine will, have always regulated themselves by the expectation of a state of happiness or misery, proportioned to the degree of their virtue or vice: and they must necessarily do so; because it is impossible for them to doubt, that the Deity will do what is right and fit to be done.

The knowledge of this attribute is of such consequence in the conduct of life, that if we knew in all cases what was right and fit, we should know the mind of God in all cases. And though there are many cases in which it is impossible for us to know, with certainty, what is right and fit, there are many more in which we have the most absolute certainty: and in these our belief of the purity and rectitude of the divine will, is the same to us, that the Urim and Thummim on Aaron's breast-plate were to the people of Israel; for if we are conscious to ourselves of doing what is right and fit in any case, we may be equally so of the approbation of God in that particular case; and if we are conscious of wrong in any particular case, we are equally conscious of his displeasure

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and disapprobation. On this account it is, that all mankind have agreed in ascribing a sacred authority to conscience, calling it sometimes the voice of God, and sometimes the vicerent of God; because in all plain cases of right and wrong, we have as clear, and indubitable, and authoritative a discovery of the mind or will of God, as if we heard a voice from heaven, or were favoured with any other special revelation on the subject.

Self-love has a mighty power in blinding and perverting the judgement; and therefore we do not so easily admit the divine displeasure at vice, as his delight in virtue: but the one is never found separate from the other, unless in the vain imaginations of deluded men; and that delusion vanishes of course, upon considering the impossibility of loving what is lovely, or esteeming what is praise-worthy, without a proportional contempt or abhorrence of their opposites. It is impossible for us to conceive, that God should love or esteem a person for his amiable or estimable qualities, without his having an equal degree of disregard and abhorrence of one possessed of the opposite qualities.

qualities. Whatever is the judgement of self-love, this is undoubtedly the judgement of reason; and it is our duty to appeal from the one to the other, until we arrive at a way of thinking that can be depended on in the conduct of life.

Our idea of the divine rectitude is often impaired and traversed, by our idea of the divine goodness; but this is entirely owing to our imputing to God the weakness of man. Hardly can we ourselves indulge any degree of affection for a person, without some degree of indulgence to his faults and vices; as, on the other hand, we seldom give full scope to our displeasure at mens vices, without losing, in some degree, the tenderness that is due to their persons. There are few, extremely few, of mankind, so much above the weakness of human nature, as to preserve these seemingly opposite affections in their just strength; but this we must necessarily suppose of God, who is not liable to our weaknesses, and whose judgement, therefore, must always be according to truth. In strictness of speech, we ought not to ascribe love or hatred, esteem or contempt, or any other affection

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of the human mind, to God: but we must believe, that the right is conformable, and the wrong, in all cases, is disagreeable, and diametrically opposite to the mind and will of God; and we must further believe, that it is absolutely impossible, that he should, on any consideration or by any means whatever, be reconciled to the wrong, or alienated from the right, as created beings may be; because he is essentially just and good.

Parents, and law-givers, have an end and object beyond themselves; with a view to which all their measures are formed, and by which therefore they are regulated: but it is impossible that the Deity should have any other object of his government besides the exercise and enjoyment of his own adorable perfections; and whether he dispenses good or evil, rewards or punishments, it is impossible that his will should submit to any other regulation besides its own essential rectitude. He makes the good happy, and the bad wretched, not from any such political reasons as influence human government, but from the essential perfection of his nature, which necessarily makes one
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the object of his approbation, and the other of his displeasure. It is impossible to conceive, that a good God should not love a creature who resembles himself in goodness; and it is impossible that he whom he loves should not be happy. It is impossible that he should not detest and abhor a creature whose disposition is the reverse of his own; and it is impossible that he whom God detests and abhors, should not be miserable. These truths are as obvious as any axiom in geometry; and to them we ought to adhere, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, and in contradiction to the suggestions of self-love.

Superstition and enthusiasm dictate hopes and fears with little or no regard to mortal worth; but religion, which hath its foundation in just conceptions of Deity, dictates hopes and fears in exact proportion to our consciousness of well-doing, or the contrary. If we do well, or but honestly endeavour to do so, we are sure of his approbation and favour; and if we do not, we are equally sure of his disapprobation and displeasure. These primary truths, which every one must believe
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who believes there is a God, are fundamental to religion; and we are religious, or otherwise, as we do or do not regulate ourselves by them.

C H A P. V.

That their guilt is atrocious who deny what is due to the Deity, may, with safety, be appealed to those who retain the least sense of what is due to a benefactor or parent, a sovereign or judge.

WE have already observed, that men do not judge in religion by the same rules of good sense and candour which they employ on other subjects; and shall often have occasion to renew the complaint in the course of this Appeal; and before we proceed farther, think fit, in this place, to declare against all such dissingenuous practices, and the indulgence they have hitherto met with. If a man, in the concerns of common life, shows a promptness to offer absurd objections to obvious truths, we conceive an ill opinion of his understanding; but when men have fled to mere metaphysics, to arbitra-

ry suppositions, to chimeras, and mad conceits, in opposition to the most obvious truths in religion, they have been indulged the freedom of debate, and one demonstration after another has been offered for their satisfaction. When a man shows an alertness in devising one topic of reasoning after another, to elude obligations of justice or gratitude, of which he cannot be altogether ignorant, we conceive a bad opinion of his heart; but licentious writers against the primary truths of religion are treated respectfully, though the visible tendency of all they say is to weaken, and, if possible, to elude the obligations we are under, in justice and gratitude, to the worship and obedience of the greatest and best of beings. Such a manner of proceeding is no less disgraceful to learning, than dishonourable to religion.

We are not ignorant, that our celebrated writers, mistaking reverse of wrong for right, have endeavoured to correct the partial zeal of their forefathers for the duties of the first table, by a zeal equally partial for those of the second table of the law; and that many of them losing sight
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of God in a great measure, have made the interests of society the sole standard of right and wrong; and in compliance with the corrupt taste of the times, have laid out all their zeal about social virtue, treating our behaviour towards God as a matter of slight concern, if they do not pass it over altogether. But we appeal to common sense; and defy them to offer the shadow of reason, why a man ought not to be as sensible of his obligations to Almighty God as to any inferior being; and why he should not be as strictly bound in justice to pay all due acknowledgements to him, as to any other to whom he is indebted; or on whom he depends; or why the man who prevaricates in religion should not be as much the object of contempt and abhorrence, as he who prevaricates on any other subject of importance.

If a man has the meanness of soul to deny his family and friends, because they are not respected as he could wish by people of fashion, he is held in contempt: If, to gratify the petulance of his temper, or the humour of those he sits with, he throws out contemptuous jeers on his father and friends, he renders himself detestable:

And if, after a course of undutiful behaviour, he is deaf to the kind sollicitations of his father, because the good man is not respected by people of fashion, he is looked upon as a monster. What then shall we say of those, who, from no better principles, act a part no less culpable to the father of angels and men? If a man goes about to frame arguments for lessening his obligations to the person who protects him from his adversaries, and ministers to all his wants, we scruple not to call him a villain: What epithet then shall we bestow on those who employ all the parts wherewith God hath blessed them, to weaken, and, if possible, to cancel the obligations of religion? If the subject of any jurisdiction shall add to repeated transgressions of the law, an open disavowal of its authority, or a contemptuous neglect of its institutions, are we to wonder, that such a miscreant should be crushed by its power? What then ought they to expect, who are conscious of such behaviour towards the sovereign of the universe? This is not reasoning; but it is common sense. You may call it preaching; and indeed it is the only way in which

which a man of sense and spirit would deliver his thoughts from the pulpit on a subject so plain and interesting: and if it is not fit to convince the judgement, which indeed is not necessary, it is fit to reach a better end; namely, to touch the hearts at least of those who are not past feeling.

When men act a part that is plainly irrational, they have no title to delicate treatment; and if they will betake themselves to futile surmises, in contradiction to truths engraven on every human heart, they have no cause to complain of the freedom that is used with them. On the contrary, they ought to believe themselves treated with abundance of respect, when we suppose them possessed of as much probity and good sense as lays the foundation of an appeal.

There is a law, obliging every accuser to swear to the truth of his accusation, if required; and were the friends of religion allowed the privilege which every accused person has by this law, the controversy about primary truths would soon be at an end. Or if they who take the liberty of objecting, would seriously ask themselves, whether they really believe the truth

truth of their own objections, there would be no controversy at all.

Upon the whole, there is no end to cavilling; but if a man have as much judgment as enables him to distinguish betwixt obvious truth and palpable absurdity, with as much probity as makes him feel the obligations of justice and gratitude, we undertake to give him satisfaction concerning the primary truths of religion: and if he has as much fortitude as to follow the direction of his own heart, in opposition to the mode of the times, and the cravings of his irregular appetites and affections, we will promise him a satisfaction from adopting obvious truth, superior to what can arise from any laboured proof or demonstration.

Let him take ever so short a survey of the stupendous order and harmony which reigns in that system of which he makes a part, and if he retains any degree of probity and good sense, he must acknowledge the immense power and wisdom of him who produced, upholds, and directs the whole. Let him attend for a moment to that profusion of blessings derived from the supreme being on such a multitude

tude of creatures, and if he hath the common feelings of a man, he must be sensible of the divine goodness. Let him observe the variety of sufferings by which he checks, chastises, and punishes the undutiful behaviour of his subjects, and he will be forced to acknowledge the justice of God. Or if, as is probable, he inclines to elude the evidence of this awful attribute, let him ask himself, whether he can conceive, that a being of absolute perfection should inflict, permit, or threaten such sufferings to any number of his creatures, without just cause; or whether, on any consideration whatever, he should enter into any measures of government, or give any treatment to any one of his subjects that is not conformable to the strictest rules of reason, equity, and justice. Or if, disaffected to this way of thinking, he inclines to betake himself to abstruse reasoning, to arbitrary suppositions, to wild chimeras, or, what is yet more effectual, to indolence, to ignorance, and insensibility, he ought to ask himself, what this may avail him? He ought to remember, that he is a man, distinguished from inferior animals, and dignified by a perception

ception and feeling of truth, which he may neglect or pervert, but which he cannot destroy; that it is easy to withhold those acknowledgements we owe to the Almighty, but it is not possible to cancel the debt; that there are numberless ways of opposing the just measures of his government, but that by no force or artifice can we prevail; that shame, remorse, and inconceivable anguish, is, in the nature of things, connected with unworthy behaviour, which, though it may be dissimbled or diverted by various ways, cannot be disappointed of its intended effect and operation, but by a change of behaviour; and, in short, that he is a fool, and worse than a fool, who does not employ those powers by which he is distinguished and dignified, for the purposes for which they were given; and particularly, and in the first place, for the honour of God, his Maker, his Father, his Sovereign, and his Judge.

BOOK

B O O K IV.

Of Providence.

C H A P. I.

It is impossible for created beings to exist, or act, independently of their creator, for one moment of time.

WHETHER Heathen philosophers had a just idea, or any idea at all, of creation, is a question of little concern to us, who are furnished from scripture with an idea of it, which Longinus admired as sublime, which every rational being will easily admit, and which, when admitted, gives us true and extensive conceptions of the divine administration. The government of the world is implied in creation; so that whoever admits the one must necessarily admit the other; it being impossible to conceive, that created beings should exist in any other form, or move and act in any other way, or that their motions and actions

should be productive of any other effects, or attended with any other consequences, than are prescribed by him who gave them their being, and powers of action: and to say, that the world is governed by laws and powers of action conferred by God, is, in other words, to say, that God governs the world. — Some beings he hath endued with a power, under certain limitations, of perceiving the right and the wrong, and, under certain limitations, of determining themselves to do the right, and shun the wrong, of free choice: and to a right conduct of this kind he hath annexed certain happy consequences; as to an opposite conduct he hath annexed consequences of an opposite kind: and these powers of action, with the consequences attending them, on the one side and on the other, being derived from the same sovereign will which gave being to all things, hold on in the same invariable manner with all the other powers of nature; that is, there is a moral as well as a natural government; and the one is as little liable to infringement as the other.

He who said, "Let light be, and light was," did, by the same sovereign command,

mand, require the heavenly bodies to perform many thousands of revolutions for the accommodation of his subjects ; and they have performed them : and by the same sovereign command they will continue to perform these revolutions, till the period arrives when he appoints them to stop. The same authority that first endued matter with the power of gravitation, and of producing effects thereby of so great consequence to the planetary system, continues and maintains these laws without decay or variation. The sovereign command that made man and other animals living souls, upholds and maintains the same life and being from generation to generation ; and the same power, that is, the same almighty *Fiat* which gave to man a capacity, under certain limitations, of acting by judgement and free choice, and of enjoying the fruits of his choice, preserves the exercise of the same powers, under the same limitations, and the enjoyment of the same consequences, amidst the infinite variety of powers in nature, wherewith he is encompassed, and by which he is influenced.

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No

No created being, animate or inanimate, rational or irrational, can exist, act, think, or move, independently, for one moment; but all proceed in their course, by the direction of the same sovereign command which brought them into existence: and we, whom he honours with a power of self-determination, and of governing the motions of this curious and complicated machine we inhabit, by a mere *Fiat* of our will, cannot entertain the least doubt, that the supreme ruler doth, as the scripture speaks, whatever he willeth, throughout the whole system of nature.

Ignorant and unthinking people alledge, that it would be more for the honour of God, to make a world that would subsist and act by its own power, than that which is perpetually upheld and governed by the same power which brought it into existence; as it is more for the honour of a mechanic to make a clock or watch that will go by itself, than one that needs continually the touch of his hand. But they do not consider what an improper comparison they have made, and what wretched philosophers they are. A mechanic does
not

not create the powers of mechanism; nor could he do any thing in his business if they were not all created to his hand. All the powers he puts in motion had their existence before he was born, and will exist after he is dead; and the only privilege he enjoys, which indeed is considerable, is to give a direction and adjustment to these powers, such as affords them the occasion of exerting themselves. Statesmen, generals, and mechanics, do so far resemble the supreme ruler, that they can put in motion those powers of nature which he gave and upholds: but they can neither give nor stop motion by any other laws than he hath prescribed; for as they cannot create a single atom of matter, they can neither add to, nor take from, any of the laws which are in being, and derived from the will of the supreme ruler. That a created being should exist and act, for days and years, for ages, and for ages without end, by the will of the Almighty, is as easy to conceive, as that it should act or exist by his will for one moment; but that, for one moment, it should act or exist independently

ently of that will, is absolutely inconceivable *.

The controversy betwixt enthusiasts and pretenders to philosophy, about divine interposition, and supernatural agency, is owing to equal ignorance on both sides: for in the strict and literal sense, there is no such thing as a divine interposition, or supernatural agency. If it was the will of the sovereign of the universe, that the sun and the moon should stop at the command of Joshua, then it behoved these luminaries to stop, not in consequence of Joshua's command, but in consequence of that *Fiat* by which they came at first in-

* A sentence of scripture occurs here, and is intitled to particular notice: "As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." But the Son of God derives life from the Father in a manner totally different from creation; and which we neither understand, nor have occasion to inquire into, any further than is necessary to assure us, that he is of a rank as much superior to created beings, as he hath obtained a more excellent name than they. Of him, therefore, it is said, that he hath life in himself, even as the Father hath life in himself. But of us it is said, that in him we live, and move, and have our beings: and the same may be said of every order of beings who are brought from nothing by the sovereign command of Almighty God.

to existence, and by which they constantly perform their courses. The effect is beyond the power of man, and above the power of any law in nature with which we are acquainted; and in that sense, therefore, with great propriety, called *supernatural*, and ascribed to the interposition of God : but this creates no difficulty to real philosophers, or even to men of sense.

If moral agents had conformed to the law of their nature, and the will of the creator, with the same exactness and uniformity as the inanimate part of the creation or the inferior animals do, there would have been no occasion for an interposition of any kind ; because the course of things would have proceeded, as we say, like clock-work. But as free agents have, in manifold instances, employed their powers to purposes different from, and opposite to, what was intended, and thereby traversed the plan of the Deity, and introduced scenes in opposition to his will, it became necessary that he should interpose, for preserving the order of the universe, and for the execution of his main design : and this we can easily believe

lieve he doth by an act of his sovereign will, without infringing any of the laws he hath established. Though it is impossible for a limited understanding to comprehend his plan, or enter fully into his views; yet this we know for certain, that he hath an intimate, exact, and perfect knowledge, of all the powers he hath conferred on any created being, and of all the effects that can be produced by these powers, so as to provide against any abuse that may be made of them, without those alterations and amendments that must often be practised by imperfect artificers. We have no occasion to enter into perplexing disputes about the possibility of foreseeing future contingencies; because we are bound to entertain ideas of the supreme ruler superior to what are entertained by these disputants, namely, that he is possessed of such knowledge of the system, and such command over all its powers, as renders it absolutely easy, without any violence to the whole or to any part, to baffle all opposition, and to execute his will, even by the powers employed against him, to the confusion of his

his adversaries, and to the glory and happiness of his faithful subjects.

We are bound to ascribe the miraculous interpositions, whether of mercy or judgment, that are recorded in scripture, to the hand of the supreme ruler, because we know no subordinate agent or power in nature to which they can be ascribed; but it is not improbable, that superior intelligences may see a variety of powers and subordinate agents employed, in exact conformity with established laws, in producing these effects. Be that as it will, we ought to take all things as coming from God, either mediately or immediately, either by express appointment, or by permission; and, in particular, are bound to believe, as the scripture speaks, that every good and perfect gift cometh from above; and that, besides the profusion of blessings which perpetually flows from his bounty, he bestows on free agents a variety of blessings, temporal and spiritual, upon the right use of the powers with which they are endued.

If we turn up the soil, and by due labour prepare the ground for receiving the seed, we have reason to expect, that, by

seasonable dews and rains, and various other powers with which we are little acquainted, he will give us a plentiful increase; as, on the other hand, if we neglect to do our part, we have nothing to expect but thistles and thorns. In like manner, if we bestow due labour in the culture of our minds, we may be assured of the co-operation of a variety of powers, partly known, and partly unknown, in producing the fruits of a good life; as, on the other hand, by neglecting to do what he requires, our minds will be overrun with noxious weeds. If he hath made our application for favours essential to our obtaining them, we must apply for them, and are sure to obtain them on our application; as, on the other hand, we are sure not to obtain them on our neglecting to apply. If he hath made persisting in our application necessary to our success, we must persist, otherwise we cannot succeed; or if he hath made faith a requisite to our successful application, we must apply to him in faith, otherwise we apply in vain. And, upon the whole, we prevail with God, not by any such influence as we may have over the resolutions of
weak

weak mortals, but by conforming to that sovereign will which is immutable, and to which all things in heaven, and in earth, must yield and submit.

Every good man, who has given due attention to the subject, can name a variety of incidents as fortuitous as is the change of the weather, and a variety of suggestions as supernatural as were the alledged suggestions of Socrates's demon, which, though he cannot trace through all their steps, so as to account for them by known laws of nature, yet he can easily resolve into the laws of moral government, especially into that fundamental law mentioned by our Saviour, "To him that hath, shall be given, and he shall have abundantly; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath." And every bad man, if he would, can name a great variety of interpositions in his favour, with which if he had complied, he would have been a wiser, and better, and happier man, than he is. And there is all reason to expect, that when the drama is finished, and the secrets of mens hearts laid open, all the world will see, that, in spite of the op-

R 2 position,

position, the disorder, and confusion, arising from the misapplication of powers conferred, the whole has been conducted by the most perfect rules of sovereign power, wisdom, justice, goodness, and truth; and all the world will join in those acknowledgements of the supreme ruler made by Moses, "That he is the Rock, "his work is perfect: for all his ways "are judgement: a God of truth, and "without iniquity, just and right is he."

C. H. A. P. II.

Particular dispensations of Providence take place, without the least infringement of general laws.

TWO classes of men, infidels, to wit, and enthusiasts, opposite in all other respects, but of the same narrowness of thought, and pertinacy of opinion, are positive, that particular dispensations of Providence are inconsistent with the regular course of nature. Both allow, that this globe, and all the other spheres it is connected with, have performed their revolutions

volutions with great regularity and uniformity for many thousand years : and though they cannot trace the variations of storms and sun-shine, of winds and rains, of snow and hail ; yet they are forced to confess, that all these changes have been carried on, with a regularity conducive to the welfare of mankind and other animals, in consequence of general laws, which make a part of the plan of Providence ; but that every event, of every kind, should be in consequence of fixed laws, and make a part of the same plan, they cannot easily believe. The enthusiast is positive, that every blessing, temporal as well as spiritual, conferred on him and the society he belongs to, comes from God, not by fixed laws, for that he thinks impossible, but by a special interposition, superior, and sometimes contradictory to the operation of established laws. The infidel is willing to ascribe the great events of Providence to God ; but suspects the possibility of its reaching every minute accident, and adjusting every contradictory operation ; and also considers things of this kind as below the dignity of the supreme ruler ; and, forming his judgement

judgement by plans of government executed by men, thinks it absurd to ascribe any thing to God but the outlines of government; and contends, that lesser matters ought to be left to chance, or to what he calls the natural course of things. It is extremely difficult to set those right who err in fundamentals; especially if the error has taken deep root, and begot an obstinacy in proportion to their ignorance.

We are told, that upon Columbus's arrival in America, the natives were prodigiously surpris'd at the art of writing practis'd by Europeans; and probably pronounced upon it as minute philosophers do on this and many other subjects. Self-sufficient sophists would treat, with high disdain, the possibility of mens conveying their thoughts at a distance by scrawls on paper, which bore no resemblance to the things represented. Those of a different complexion would allow the fact, but have recourse to magic, or some supernatural operation; whereas the Spaniards, who saw no mystery in the matter, would treat the confidence of the one, and the credulity of the other, with equal contempt: and, no doubt, superior beings

beings look down with a mixture of pity and contempt on many of our weak and impertinent reasonings about the œconomy of providence.

How a system so immensely complex, can be managed, and how all its various combinations are preserved, and its divers and opposite powers are conducted, and conspire, in promoting the ends of the natural and moral government, is, no doubt, beyond our comprehension, and probably beyond the comprehension of all created intelligence. What then? The fact is unquestionable. Every atom of matter derives its existence and form from the will of the supreme ruler; every power of motion, mechanical, animal, or rational, is derived from the same source; so that it is as impossible for any thing in the heavens above, or the earth beneath, or the waters under the earth, to move or act in any other direction than it receives from the author of nature, as to give itself being or formation at first. And tho', to some created beings, he hath given a power of self-determination, and takes care to give full scope and free exercise to this power; yet he sees every possible determination

termination they can give their will, with every consequence flowing from it; and can, by his over-ruling hand, adapt the various movements of the system to the event, so as not only to prevent confusion and disorder, but to carry on his plan to a still higher degree of perfection. A philosopher, and indeed a man of sense, sees God in every thing; in the darkness as well as in the light, in the wing of a fly as well as in the harmony of the spheres, and in the most cross events as well as those that are comfortable; knowing the impossibility that any thing should happen without his direction or permission.

Besides the laws of nature with which he is acquainted, and the powers of action of which he is possessed, a wise man observes himself subjected to a variety of laws and powers of nature, which affect the health of his body, the soundness of his mind, and the success of his affairs, that to him are utterly unknown; but perfectly known to the supreme ruler, and absolutely under his direction. Besides the natural effects of his industry and endeavours in the acquisition of wisdom and virtue, he finds his progress accelerated and

and retarded by a thousand incidents, which he can no more trace than he can the course of the winds, or the alteration of the seasons; but which he believes are ordered by the same wisdom, justice, and goodness, which upholds and executes the whole, and which he considers as regular parts of the general plan of the divine government. These things have an uncouth appearance to minute philosophers, are incredible to some, and mysterious to others; but obvious and plain to men of sense, and real philosophers.

One cannot help smiling at the pitiful shifts which pretenders to learning go into, to extricate themselves from the embarrassment they are under, with respect to the operation of the Holy Ghost, and the new birth; which, to a man of true judgement, creates no difficulty at all. Do not we see the same sun, moon, and stars, the same air and æther, produce an infinite variety of qualities in different subjects, as they are differently disposed, without the least infringement of the order of nature, or the least interfering or clashing of its laws? Do not we all know, that Almighty God bestows intellectual

powers in various degrees, as to him seems meet, with natural dispositions, opposite and various, on those who live under the same system of general laws, are born of the same parents, eat at the same table, and share in the same conversation, amusements, and employments, without any variation of his general plan, that we know, or have any reason to suspect? Why then may not he, with equal ease, and with equal safety to the order of nature, and without the least infringement of any of its laws, produce a total change of sentiments and inclinations, with new habits of thinking and acting, in those who resign themselves to his influence, and conform themselves to his direction? If this subject were explained by the same rules of good sense and true philosophy which are employed on subjects of far less consequence, the new birth would be equally intelligible with any other of the productions of nature we seem to be best acquainted with. Or if it is impossible to explicate fully the œconomy of God in this, or in any other of his works, there can be no difficulty in believing it. The manner in which God makes all things work

work together for the good of those who love him, is no doubt beyond our comprehension, but of as easy conception as his making lead to sink, and wood to swim, in water.

The course of nature presents us continually with two kinds of events; one flowing from known causes, with an uniform regularity, resembling the succession of day and night; the other from unknown causes, in a manner to us as fortuitous as the shifting of the winds, or the changes of the weather; and both making essential parts of the divine government, and demanding, on that account, our serious regard and strict attention. He is deemed a fool, who, neglecting the known laws of nature, trusts his life, his health, or his fortune, to what is called chance; and he is not wise, who, relying merely on the known laws of nature, and those powers of which he is possessed, pays no regard to fortuitous events. He only is wise, who, from a sacred regard to the supreme ruler, conforms religiously to those laws with which he is acquainted, and relies implicitly on him for the execution and the accomplishment of events that ex-

ceed his own powers; by the one expressing his obedience, and by the other his faith, in God. This is religion; this is philosophy; and this is common sense.

Happy were it for some pretenders to learning, those especially of the devotee and free-thinking kind, that they knew either a great deal more, or a great deal less, of the laws of nature: for then would they conduct themselves like men of sense, keeping within their sphere, doing the duties of their station, and trusting the government of the world to Almighty God.

C H A P. III.

Without pretending to comprehend the plan of God, we see plainly, that all things are so ordered, as to favour our pursuit of virtue and happiness.

I Ngenious writers in poetry and prose have endeavoured to give satisfaction to the objections of infidels, by attempting a complete and connected view of the plan of providence: but while we applaud their zeal, we must censure their imprudence;

imprudence; for they have undertaken a thing that is impossible.

Had we the same comprehensive knowledge of the system of nature, which artificers have of machines, statesmen of plans of policy, and generals of military operations, we should then be in condition to tell why God made all things as they are; and to show distinctly, how all the parts conspire to the ultimate end and object of the divine government; and in this manner to give full satisfaction to any objection which might arise in our own or other people's minds. But this is a kind of knowledge we ought not to pretend to. To account for all the movements of the planetary system, by reducing them to laws of geometry, is bold enough; but to explicate the government of the universe, is by far too bold an attempt for creatures of such limited and narrow understanding; and of this they have given full proof by their ill success.

"It is truly amazing," says an ingenious author, "that the series of blunders, which the most exalted geniuses who applied themselves to system-making, have, by late discoveries, been found
"to

“ to have dropped into, one after ano-
“ ther, has not cured the philosophers of
“ our time of the high conceit they have
“ entertained of the compass and all-suf-
“ ficiency of the human understanding,
“ and of the madness of the undertaking,
“ to trace, with the organs we have got,
“ the hidden wonders of the material crea-
“ tion; especially since the more light we
“ gain into natural things by accidental
“ discoveries, the thicker the difficulties
“ pour themselves upon us, and the more
“ inexplicable these mysteries appear to
“ be.”

“ Then the Lord answered Job out of
“ the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that
“ darkeneth counsel by words without
“ knowledge? Gird up now thy loins
“ like a man; for I will demand of thee,
“ and answer thou me. Where wast thou
“ when I laid the foundations of the
“ earth? declare, if thou hast understand-
“ ing. Who hath laid the measures there-
“ of, if thou knowest? or who hath
“ stretched the line upon it? Whereup-
“ on are the foundations thereof fastened?
“ or who laid the corner-stone thereof?
“ when the morning-stars sang together,
“ and

“and all the sons of God shouted for joy.”

Job xxxviii. 1. 2. &c.

“When the proud steed shall know, why man
restrains

His fiery course, or drives him o’er the plains;

When the dull ox, why now he breaks the clod,

Now wears a garland, an Egyptian god;

Then shall man’s pride and dulness comprehend

His actions, passions, being, use and end;

Why doing, suff’ring, check’d, impell’d; and
why

This hour a slave, the next a deity?”

POPE.

What renders the presumptuous curiosity of men inexcuseable is, its being utterly unnecessary: for however reasonable it may be to attend to the designs of those with whom we transact business, or however excuseable it may be in subjects to attend to the intentions of their rulers, we have no occasion to trouble ourselves about the measures of the divine government, as we have sufficient direction for our conduct, with encouragement sufficient, from the discoveries we enjoy of the absolute rectitude and immutable perfection of God. Does any man suspect that he or his interest will be overlooked by the supreme ruler? let him observe how
God

God feeds the ravens, and clothes the lilies. If he dreads that he shall be treated with the rigour of justice, let him recollect those numberless instances of undeserved favour which he and many others experience daily. But if he flatters himself with the hope of impunity in his vices, let him turn his attention to miserable wretches, groaning under the fatal consequences of their ill conduct, and not forget what he himself has suffered, by departing from the path of wisdom and virtue. If any one wants further satisfaction in these important concerns, let him consult the revelation which God vouchsafes to mankind. But if he is desirous of having all difficulties cleared, and all objections answered, he must wait the period of which the revelation makes mention, when the wisdom, justice, and goodness of God, will be vindicated in the face of the world. This is common sense; and though grumbled at by philosophers, will be acquiesced in by men of sound understanding.

Without pretending to comprehend the plan of God, we may silence the common complaints against providence on account
of

of the unequal distribution of external goods, with great ease; because they flow merely from the lowness of mens conceptions, and the false judgements they entertain of the chief good. "As gold to silver, virtue is to gold," is a sentence no less just than beautiful. But do they who seem to admire the justness of this thought believe it? They do not; otherwise they would have found no ground for their complaints against Providence. They love to say fine things about virtue; but do not believe it to be the best thing in the world; or their faith at best is no better than that of the generality of professed Christians; for at bottom most men value silver and gold above virtue, which they every day exchange for a small share of these metals. Meantime they affect to honour the virtuous, and complain that Providence does not give them a larger share of such advantages as they themselves admire, and in which they place the chief happiness of man. But if men did think more honourably of virtue, and of the oeconomy of God, they might, by a fair trial, get full satisfaction. For if they would devote themselves to the study

of virtue, they would find things so ordered, that in proportion to their application, would be their progress; and in proportion to their progress in virtue, would be their inward contentment; till at last, under the patronage and direction of God, they would arrive at such a pitch of perfection, as would enable them to make light of external advantages. It is plain, that God intends a higher happiness for man than arises from the enjoyment of riches, or fame, or health, or strength of body or of mind, even a participation of the divine nature, and the inconceivable happiness resulting from it; and doth so order things, that every one who will, in good earnest, enter into this design, shall succeed in proportion to his industry: to which both good and bad men, with a little attention, can bear witness in this life, and shall give ample testimony when the scene is concluded; for it is then that the wisdom, power, and goodness, of the divine œconomy, shall shine forth in full lustre; and God will be justified in all his ways.

B O O K V.

Of Moral Government.

C H A P. I.

The phantastical notions of divine goodness propagated of late, are condemned by the phenomena from without, and the voice of conscience from within.

IF we read or hear of a prince or legislator in some remote country, or distant age, who, with unwearied diligence, promotes the happiness of his subjects, by assigning proper rewards to the obedient, and punishments to the disobedient, we are in high admiration of his character; and in like manner ought we to pay all due regard to the perfections of God, as they manifest themselves in the government of the world. But many seem insensible of the amiable and adorable perfections of the King of kings, who, from age to age, carries on the most

perfect plan of government for the benefit of his subjects; and some appear disaffected to that execution of justice to which they owe all their security, and under which they may promise themselves safety and happiness, in proportion to their conformity to the most just and salutary laws.

Men love to talk of infinite goodness in God; by which they do not mean absolute and unerring rectitude, but kind affection, without measure or bounds; which is a gross absurdity, as the affection of an intelligent being must be regulated and limited by the worth of the object; and a blind undistinguishing affection towards any object, is not a perfection, but a vice or a weakness.

We do not admire those who scatter their bounty without judgement, but censure their insensibility, or pity their weakness; and ought to be cautious of imputing attributes to the Deity which would dishonour inferior beings. Kind affection, however diversified and extended, must in all its forms be regulated, that is, limited, by wisdom and justice; and therefore the unlimited goodness towards objects of limited

limited worth, which foolish people fondly ascribe to God, is flat nonsense.

The present state of things does not admit of a full display of the moral government. A parental care of all, without exception, is apparent; but under a perfect administration, the just cannot expect their reward till they have given full proof of their adherence to the right; nor will condign punishment be inflicted on bad men till they have shewn themselves irreclaimable. A state of trial must therefore, in the nature of things, precede that exact retribution in which the goodness and justice of God will be displayed to the full. But from that connection which in the present constitution is visible between vice and suffering, virtue and happiness, we have sufficient information of the moral perfections of the supreme ruler, and such as gives ground to expect a more complete display in the progress of the divine administration. Hope and fear are proper motives for moral agents in a state of trial, and deeply planted in the breasts of all men; but that immoderate self-love which is the source of all the injustice men run into in theory or practice, leads

leads them to entertain the notion of kind affection, pity, and forgiveness, in God, without limitation; and almost every one flatters himself with the hope of his being the object of this boundless goodness, in contradiction to what he feels, and to what he fears; to the testimony of the phenomena from without, and the voice of conscience from within.

Whether the impudence or iniquity of this way of thinking best deserves animadversion, is hard to say; but it is plain, that men scruple to allow that privilege to the Almighty of which they themselves are most tenacious. Should you plead with them to pass over the distinction betwixt an adversary and a friend, they would laugh in your face; but this they expect from the goodness of God. If an adversary makes a proper submission, they will perhaps receive it; if he reforms his behaviour, they will perhaps admit him to favour: but without this to take him into favour, or treat him as a friend, they will tell you, is absurd, unreasonable, unnatural, and contrary to all the rules of just conduct; especially if to his perseverance in the wrong, this adversary adds

a contemptuous neglect of all the means that have been used to reclaim him; and yet they most hypocritically pretend, (for they do not believe), that they expect all this indulgence from a good God to the most determined and audacious offenders. Such are the perversions of judgement thinking creatures are liable to, when, abandoning the dictates of probity and good sense, they give themselves up to the flattering suggestions of false learning.

We are not to wonder, that creatures, conscious of their being obnoxious to the justice of God, should labour to exclude this attribute from the divine government: but all in vain; for if the notions we entertain of the goodness of God obliges us to have recourse to an impossibility of preventing the evils we feel and fear, then a question occurs, Whether this impossibility arises from weakness or justice in the supreme ruler? and as the mind of man revolts against the first supposition, we must necessarily settle in that belief of the absolute rectitude of the supreme ruler, with that sense of good and ill desert, which is deeply engraved on the human heart.

C H A P. II.

It is impossible that the supreme ruler should sacrifice justice to the happiness of his creatures.

ANY one the least acquainted with the writings of the learned, will observe a zeal and industry to get rid of the justice of God, in all the accounts they make of the divine œconomy; and may see, at the same time, the miserable shifts to which they are reduced, in accounting for the evils that are in the world, without having recourse to this awful attribute. To pass over the various suppositions of those who make mention of difficulties with which almighty power is environed, and a necessity arising from the nature of things, which cannot be controlled without incurring a greater inconveniency; to pass over those defences, which, however competent for the justification of governors of limited ability, ought never to be mentioned here; let us bestow a little attention on an hypothesis in which many of the learned seem to exult,

ult, namely, That God permits a certain number of his creatures to be wicked and miserable for the good of the whole; a species of barbarity not to be found in any well-regulated government. When the Czar of Muscovy proposed to King William, that one of the sailors should undergo keel-haling for his entertainment, he was told, that the laws of England did not allow any punishment to be inflicted on a subject without guilt; and when he proposed that one of his barbarians should be keel-haled, he was told again, that all strangers, during their stay in this country, were under the protection of its laws: and this is recorded to the honour of the British constitution. When a subject of government has, by his misbehaviour, forfeited his liberty, his limbs, or his life, to the laws of his country, justice authorises and demands his punishment; and may also demand, that he be made an example of suffering for the good of the community: but, without such forfeiture, to suppose that any subject, or number of subjects, should be sacrificed to the good of the whole, is extremely shocking. Shall we condemn

a Heathen prince for sacrificing his innocent daughter to obtain a prosperous gale for the states of Greece, and at the same time impute this injustice to Almighty God? Did not God appoint the Canaanites to be extirpated chiefly for this abomination? and shall we make it a part of a philosophical hypothesis? This impious folly shews us the danger of departing from the primary truths of religion, and the genuine sentiments of the human heart.

The only hypothesis on this subject that is tolerable, is that which makes, not the good of the whole, but of every individual, the ultimate end and object of the divine government; assuring every one, the devils not excepted, that by a due course of suffering, they shall be brought to happiness. This is a doctrine which no good-natured man would chuse to confute, and no modest man will maintain, without the authority of revelation: for if a forfeiture is incurred, it belongs to the judge, and to him alone, to grant a release. But even this hypothesis cannot take place, without the supposition of a forfeiture to justice; for without a forfei-

ture

ture to justice, it would be absurdly impious to suppose, that the supreme ruler would permit multitudes of creatures to go through scenes of vice and misery to that happiness to which he could bring them, by ways more agreeable to himself, and less painful to them. Thus you see, that justice is inseparable from our ideas of God, and cannot be excluded by any account of things devised by the wit of men.

The learned of our day will have us to think, that happiness, mere happiness, is the ultimate end and object of the divine government. But whatever reason there is to expect the happiness of the just, there is no ground to believe, that God will make bad men happy. They confidently affirm, that a being completely happy in himself, could have no other end in bringing creatures into existence, than to make them happy. But this is unpardonable rashness. For if the sole end of bringing creatures into being, was to make them happy, then they could not be in pain or misery for a single moment; because the supreme ruler could not be disappointed of his end in one single instance, or for

one moment of time. Plans formed by beings of limited capacity may fail in the execution; but no defect can be imputed to him whose understanding is infinite, and whose power is without control. This hypothesis, therefore, must be fundamentally wrong.

In writings on this subject, the sole and ultimate end are put for the same thing; for this reason, that subordinate ends are of the nature of means, that are dropped or pursued with a view only to the ultimate end; which therefore is the sole end in every just plan. Common sense will hardly authorise weak mortals to fix the ultimate end and object of the divine government; but the greatest possible increase of moral worth, seems best to correspond to appearances, and to the dignity of the supreme ruler; and probably was meant, in the last age, by the glory of God, and is now exchanged for the happiness of the creature, by those who favour a more lax theology; the tendency of which error is, to bring down virtue to the rank of a mean, or subordinate end, the place it always held with hypocrites and

and villains of all kinds, who regard it no farther than serves their purpose.

They argue, that every good parent would do every thing, to the utmost stretch of his power, to make his children happy; that there is scarce a man possessed of so little goodness, who, if he had the power, would not make every one who existed, and every one especially whom he brought into existence, as happy as he could make them; and hence conclude peremptorily, that he who exceeds all other beings in goodness, will do every thing possible to make his creatures happy. This, it must be owned, has a specious appearance, and is extremely flattering; and no wonder it should be greedily swallowed. But this is nothing other than reasoning, and a species too of reasoning that is apt to mislead; for it is indeed what Lord Bolingbroke calls making God after the image of man: and, what is worst of all, this fine reasoning, like many other productions of that faculty, is contrary to fact, and to all our ideas of absolute perfection. For it is plain, God doth not all that is possible to be done, to make all his creatures happy; and therefore

fore the happiness of the creature could not be the ultimate end and object of his government.

No doubt, the generality of parents would make every thing give way to the happiness of their children; because they are more strongly attached to their childrens interest than to justice; and therefore, possessed of the power, would intend nothing but a succession of pleasurable sensations for those they love, and would make every thing yield and give way to their ultimate end and object. But we must entertain higher and more honourable thoughts of the supreme ruler. Could we believe, that there is no essential difference betwixt virtue and vice, no innate beauty in the one, or odiousness in the other, or that an intelligent being might be insensible to the difference, as has been said or insinuated by late writers, we might make what we please the ultimate end and object of the divine government. But common sense perceives, and feels, the difference betwixt a man of worth and a villain, as plainly and sensibly, as the difference betwixt black and white, sweet and bitter: and to suppose that

that the difference is not equally perceptible to God, is unpardonable blasphemy. Could we believe that the Deity hath but a slender regard for the difference betwixt right and wrong conduct, such as appears often in parents, magistrates, statesmen, and even in the generality of mankind, we might expect that he would promote the happiness of his creatures at any rate. But this supposition is impious and incredible. Could we suppose, that the love of his creatures exceeded his love of justice, we might think he would make justice yield and give way to the happiness of his creatures. But this supposition is horrid; and whatever, through the influence of self-love, men may think in their own particular case, it is impossible for a man of sense to entertain this judgement of the divine administration.

Upon the whole, this hypothesis, which, through the faulty negligence of the learned, has obtained an universal currency, is fit to be adopted by none but pirates, and robbers, and corrupted statesmen, who show no regard to the difference betwixt right and wrong, beyond what suits the purposes of them and their associates.

We

We think to flatter God, as caitiffs do their judges, by high talk of their goodness and clemency, at the expence of their justice; but we are doing all we can to kindle his displeasure to its highest pitch. For to tell him, that right and just are of no consideration, or of small consideration, with him; that, like many of the potentates of this world, he regards them no farther than may be subservient to favourite purposes; that, for our sake, or for the sake of any creatures for whom he hath an affection, he can dispense with the regard he hath for justice; is an indignity that shall not escape its due punishment. We invite thoughtless men to the service of God, by false and flattering speeches about his unbounded goodness; but are not aware, that we cherish hopes in their minds which must end in a dreadful disappointment; and while we glory in avoiding an extreme gone into by our fathers, we have pursued another extreme far more absurd, and attended with consequences yet more fatal; and do not advert, that by our ill-judged zeal, we detract from that attribute which we labour to exalt: for if God hath but a slender regard

gard for the difference betwixt right and wrong conduct, we cannot think highly of his bearing patiently with our faults, or even of his forgiving them; and can consider that amazing plan of reconciling the world to himself by Jesus Christ, in no other light than that in which we view the common phenomena of nature, if indeed we can form any clear consistent idea of the subject. Can we suppose, that a good God would suffer a person of such amiable character, and one so near and dear to him, to undergo such exquisite sufferings, if justice did not make it necessary? Can we suppose, that he would suffer the children of men, who are the workmanship of his hands, and for whom he gives such manifold proofs of kind affection;—I say, can we suppose, that he would permit even these guilty creatures to be subjected to the evils which they suffer in a present, and the more dreadful evils they fear in another state, from any other consideration than a sacred regard to justice? Can we doubt, that almighty power, directed by infinite understanding, would have prevented all these evils, and made all these creatures happy in some

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degree, if it could be done in consistency with justice? Or can we make sense of the divine œconomy which appears in this life, and what we expect in the next, without admitting justice as an essential attribute of the divine nature? We cannot: And the moment that bad men are relieved from the delirium they are under, they will see this attribute in its true light; and, giving up their fantastical expectations, will regulate their judgement of the divine administration by a standard of rectitude they were all along possessed of, but which, through an immoderate self-love, they have hitherto overlooked.

C H A P. III.

The supreme ruler hath a right to govern his creatures with a just regard to merit and demerit.

OUR parents are but the instruments of our being; yet we submit to their authority: with what face, then, can we dispute the jurisdiction of him who gives us life, and breath, and all things? We
exclaim

exclaim against the ruler or magistrate, who, through partial affection, is indulgent to the worthless and undeserving; and shall we at the same time exclaim against the supreme ruler, for rendering to every one according to his deeds? We hold those in contempt who appear insensible of indignities; yet pretend to wonder, that the Almighty should take offence at our undutiful behaviour. We doubt not his being pleased with our good, but cannot believe that he is displeased with our bad actions. We look for a reward of the first, but think the punishment of the last improper and incongruous. What strange opinions possess those who do not listen to the simple dictates of reason and common sense? We approve and acquiesce in the punishment of those in whom we are not interested; but when it comes near ourselves, are apt to raise an outcry of severity, if not of injustice. Is there any difficulty in discovering the source of these opinions, and of all the reasonings devised in support of them?

Our fathers contented themselves with trespassing against the laws of the Almighty; but we dispute his right of government.

ment. They committed many dangerous mistakes ; but nothing less will content us, than setting up a new god, with attributes suited to our purpose, who will always be pleased, and never displeased, with our behaviour ; in all which claims we are countenanced by men of learning. They cannot relieve our minds from a sense of demerit, and dread of punishment ; but affirm, that a disposition to punish a criminal from regard to justice, cannot be an attribute of God ; and to put the matter beyond doubt, appeal to ourselves ; and knowing that our regard to justice is but slender at best, they have no doubt of carrying the cause by this appeal.

You are then supposed to be in a desert island, with a very wicked companion ; and asked, whether you would find yourself under any obligation, from justice, to punish his wickedness ? You are allowed to break his bones, or take his life, in your own defence ; but, self-defence apart, you are asked, whether you could find in your heart to treat him according to his demerit ? On supposition of your loving what is right, and abhorring what is wrong, you must be allowed to entertain

tain a just displeasure at his ill behaviour; and your displeasure must rise to a height proportioned to the degree of his wickedness;—but you are not allowed an inclination to punish. Benevolence, on the contrary, will dispose you to use every mean in your power to reclaim the wretch; but should he prove irreclaimable, justice does not authorise you to punish him. You may despise, abhor, and deny him your countenance and friendship; but still you cannot punish. And, *a fortiori*, it is argued, that you cannot suppose a disposition in a being of unlimited goodness, to punish even the worst and most worthless of his creatures. These are perhaps the most specious things that can be offered against the moral government:—but all this is reasoning, and reasoning too of the analogical kind, opposed to the authority of reason, of common sense, and the genuine sentiments of the human heart; and by a little attention you will discover, that all this fine reasoning is extremely erroneous.

It is expected you should despise and abhor your wicked companion: and this indeed may be no punishment; for it is probable,

probable, he will dislike you as much as you do him. It is expected you should withdraw your countenance from him, and deny him your company: but neither is this a punishment; for on this desert island he will find entertainment more to his taste than your conversation. But is it fit to carry this analogy to Almighty God? Will any one who pretends to philosophy say, that to be abhorred of God is nothing? Is it possible for one to be happy, or not to be miserable in the highest degree, who is the object of the divine displeasure? Minute philosophers may carp at the fire that is never quenched; but on the principles of theology, or philosophy, one may ask, whether any fire of any kind is more to be dreaded than the divine displeasure? O Philosophy! to what pernicious purposes hast thou been perverted and prostituted in modern times! and what foolish and impious tenets under thy guise are propagated and swallowed, even by men of understanding, even by those of no bad intention; who, like formalists in religion, assume the name, without taking the trouble that is necessary to their becoming philosophers! Justice

Justice cannot authorise you to punish your wicked companion; for this plain reason, that he does not belong to you; nor can you, in the strict and proper sense of the word, be called his master. A right to self-defence is common to all; but a right of bestowing rewards and punishments in proportion to merit and demerit, is the prerogative of the supreme ruler and judge. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?" says the scripture: "to his own master he standeth or falleth." Even magistrates and princes have no other power than of self-defence; for they can inflict no punishments but with a view to the safety of the state, that is, to self-defence. But who will lay the supreme ruler under those restraints, or offer any such objection in bar of his judgement? He hath the sovereign dominion over all; for all are his creatures, and it belongs to him to assign to every creature that lot which corresponds to his character. He will, and we see he doth, employ a great variety of means to reclaim those that are out of the way, and exercises great patience and long-suffering towards them; but if any creature shall, by his obstinate wickedness,

kedness, baffle all the efforts of his goodness, and forfeit all title to his favour, he will undoubtedly assign him that lot which suits his demerit, because it is fit and just he should do so.

We do not doubt, that the punishment of the disobedient may tend to the safety and happiness of the good subject; and cannot deny, that under the direction of sovereign power and wisdom, the misery of the wicked may be rendered subservient to the good of the whole *: but shall never allow this to be either the cause or occasion of their misery; or that a being of absolute perfection could sacrifice any class of creatures, or a single individual, to what modern philosophers call the good of the whole; or that from partial affection, or from any consideration whatever, he will inflict, or permit, any evil of any kind to take place under his government, beyond what justice requires. And as we find, that evil does take place as well as

* In human works, though labour'd on with pain,

A thousand movements scarce one purpose gain:

In God's, one single can its end produce;

Yet serves to second too some other use.

POPE.

good,

good, we must resolve the latter into his justice, and the former into his fatherly affection; and giving up with vulgar prejudices, and the suggestions of false learning, must believe, that justice is as essential to him as goodness. Hitherto Philosophy has been called the hand-maid of Religion; but if she does not acquit herself better than she has done, this hand-maid ought to be dismissed, and Common Sense put in her place: so that giving up subtile refinements, and delusive imaginations, men may form their notions of God upon the clear exhibition of his perfections which we have from his administration, and from that simple perception of obvious truth to which wise men trust in all important concerns.

Upon the whole, the business here is not to reason, but to judge; and as we have already affirmed, we again repeat, and insist on, the impossibility of conceiving a being of absolute perfection, who should act improperly, or who should not conduct himself with the strictest propriety in every case whatever, and towards every individual under his government.

If there are any who see no impropriety in shewing the same regard to thieves, sharpers, and fots; that is due to the sober, the pious, and the just; and no propriety in giving greater countenance to those who sacrifice their ease, their interest, and their reputation, to their duty, than to others who prefer the gratification of their appetites, and their passions, to all the regard they owe to God or man; we do not appeal to them, but to those only who retain that abhorrence of vice, and that love and admiration of virtue, which is common to rational beings, and to be found in almost every individual of the human kind.

That the genuine sentiments of the rational soul are obscured and blunted by bad natural disposition, bad education, bad example, and most of all by bad practice, is too apparent; but still, in proportion to the degree of common sense a man retains, he will believe, that the supreme ruler conducts himself with propriety; and of consequence will look for his favour or displeasure, as he does good or evil: and this is all that ever was meant by

by moral government, or just administration.

C H A P. IV.

All know enough of the supreme excellence of moral worth, to silence their murmurs against its being the ultimate end and object of the divine government,

THE cordial belief of this famous sentence, "As gold to silver, virtue is to gold," would (as has been observed) silence the murmurs of men against the unequal distribution of external blessings: but many who seem proud of being thought to believe this sentence, do not believe it, or do not believe it from their heart. They have what divines call a speculative faith, which swims on the surface of the mind, but does not reach the heart. There is another much-admired sentence, "An honest man is the noblest work of God," which if men believed sincerely, would not only silence their murmurs against the divine administration, but give them quite other ideas of

the plan of God than those they entertain. For did they believe in good earnest, that an honest man is the noblest work of God, they never would have thought of happiness, mere happiness, as the ultimate end and object of his government. As they must believe, that a being of absolute perfection would have had an end to which all his operations tended, and in which they would centre; so would they have thought, that this end must have been of the noblest and most worthy kind. And if they indeed believed, that virtue or honesty was the noblest and most worthy end which could be fixed upon, they must believe, that it was the ultimate end and object of his government. But the bulk of mankind have but faint and superficial ideas of the excellence of honesty and virtue. They find that those qualities have great use in life; and so far they value them. The virtues that are conducive to health, to reputation, to interest, and pleasure, they allow to be worthy of their pursuit; but have no idea of sacrificing their ease, their pleasure, their interest, or reputation, to virtue and honesty; and cannot imagine, that this should be the
ultimate

ultimate end and object of a rational being. They talk respectfully of the heroes of antiquity, of saints and martyrs, and pretend to admire them, and even in common life put the highest value on those good actions which are performed with great opposition from without and from within; but are not sincere in their sentiments, or their sentiments on these subjects are absurd and contradictory: and with such absurd and contradictory sentiments they presume to censure the œconomy of God. They think, that the Almighty could have prevented all trial of mens honesty, all struggle, all pain, and difficulty, in the practice of virtue; and wonder that he has not done it. On such foundations as these have minute philosophers reared up systems of cosmogony, in contradiction to the plan of the Deity.

It is a question, Whether any but the virtuous and honest know any thing at all of the worth of virtue and honesty? It is certain, that you cannot give the least conception of rational happiness to a brute; and it is extremely difficult to give it to a brutish man: and though men talk high of virtue and honesty, it is a question

question whether they believe, or even understand, what they say : at least it may be doubted, whether the bulk of mankind have any idea of the supreme excellence of moral worth ; and it is certain they have no such knowledge of it as God and the holy angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect, have ; and cannot estimate its worth as *they* do ; and yet there is something in man that bears testimony to the supreme excellence of moral worth. Let us suppose two persons to live ten, twenty, or a thousand years, (for it makes no difference), and that one enjoys all the sweet sensations arising from the possession of ease, pleasure, reputation, and of every thing which goes under the name of interest, and enjoys it also with a good conscience ; that the other has, in numberless instances, renounced his ease, his pleasure, his reputation with men, and even his worldly interest, for the sake of conscience : — Which of the two is the greatest gainer ? which of the two is the more worthy person ? and which of the two is the object of the highest esteem with God and all good men ? and let us add, which of the two has the greatest satisfaction,

tisfaction within himself? and which of the two is best qualified to make others happy, and to answer all the purposes of a wise and good administration? and, finally, which of the two characters is the most worthy to be the ultimate end and object of the divine government? It is needless to ask, which of the two characters would be made choice of by the bulk of mankind? for that, alas! is too apparent: but which would be preferred by a being of absolute perfection? So that, after all, we must, in spite of our hearts, acknowledge, that the virtuous and the honest are the excellent ones of the earth; and that to produce as great a number of these, in the highest perfection of which they are capable, is, with regard to us at least, the ultimate end and object of the divine government.

We are not sufficiently informed, and indeed we are not duly observant of the steps which have been already taken to promote this end, and know little of what is beyond us; but if we will study to become dutiful subjects of the kingdom of God, and have a little patience, we shall see the all-perfect sovereign of the universe

verse carrying on the noblest ends by the noblest means, to our entire satisfaction: and this satisfaction will grow upon us through all the endless ages of our existence. And in the mean time we have all reason to be satisfied: for, in spite of wrong bias and prejudice, we know, and must confess, that honesty and virtue are the noblest productions of wisdom and power, and most worthy to be the ultimate end and object of the divine government. And, what is more,—in spite of our exorbitant love of interest, pomp, and pleasure, we know, that the virtuous man is the happiest and the most worthy of all the race; and would wish, if a wish could do, that we ourselves were virtuous and honest in the highest possible degree.

When good men, having broke loose from this cumbersome flesh, and escaped the vanities of life, are brought into the presence of God, and the spirits of just men made perfect, they feel a joy and satisfaction of which we can have but a faint idea, and, in transport of praise, celebrate the power, wisdom, and goodness, of him who destined them of old, and has now brought them to this state of glory and
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and felicity : and possibly they may conclude, that the ultimate end and object of the divine government respecting them is fully accomplished. But when, in the progress of time, new scenes open, new employments present themselves, and new faculties spring up in their souls, or an unexpected enlargement of all their powers takes place, they will then see occasion to think more highly of the plan of God; and, after a few ages more, will see the same occasion to enlarge their views without altering their judgement in the main. For the beautiful allusion to one travelling over the Alps is no less applicable here than to our progress in science, as it is impossible to conceive the height to which an immortal spirit, delivered from the bondage of corruption, may be raised. — This is a prospect we must allow to be grand; and whether this, or an eternal succession of pleasurable sensations, is most worthy to be the ultimate end and object of the supreme ruler, may be submitted to every one who is endued with the judgement and spirit of a man.

The account Longinus makes of the sublime may enable us to judge of the ul-

timiate end and object of the divine government. Let us then hear this noble critic: "Nature never designed man to
" be a groveling and ungenerous animal,
" but brought him into life, and placed
" him in the world, as in a crowded
" theatre; not to be an idle spectator, but
" spurred on by an eager thirst of excel-
" ling, ardently to contend in the pursuit
" of glory.—For this purpose, she im-
" planted in the soul an invincible love of
" grandeur, and a constant emulation of
" what seems nearer to divinity than him-
" self. Hence it is, that the whole uni-
" verse is not sufficient for the extensive
" reach, and piercing speculation, of the
" human mind. It passes the bounds of
" the material world, and lanches forth
" at pleasure into endless space."—This
perhaps is too grand a thought to enter
into the soul of a minute philosopher.

CHAR,

C H A P. V.

While men are disaffected to their duty, they must be dissatisfied with the plan of God.

AFTER all that has been said, or can be said, in favour of the plan of God, a difficulty remains not easy to be overcome; — the same which you find in persuading an unjust man to make restitution of his ill-gotten wealth; — the same which you find in persuading a vain self-sufficient man to acknowledge his error, or a covetous person to do a generous action; — they *will* not. There is not a bad man on earth, nor a devil in hell, who would not gladly conform to the plan of God, if it could be brought about without his own choice; but here it sticks.

One has a natural inclination to certain acts of devotion, and these he performs with great chearfulness; and on that account has the boldness to rank himself amongst the subjects of God, though he is conscious to himself of living in the habitual neglect of other duties expressly requi-

red. Another has a natural inclination to perform certain acts of justice, generosity, and gratitude, to certain persons; and values himself on these; and has the boldness to claim the character of generous and just, though he is conscious to himself of the most heinous injustice and ingratitude towards God. There is scarce a man who has not a natural inclination to fulfil some religious or moral obligations; and there is scarce a man who does not claim a religious or moral character on account of this partial obedience. And there are not a few who think, or seem to think, that this is all which can in justice be required; at least there are multitudes who grudge taking the trouble of reconciling their will to the will of God, and even complain of it as an hardship; and as there are never wanting men of speculation to give countenance to the most pernicious folly of the human heart, so they have actually entered into a train of subtle reasoning against the plan of God upon this account.

They pretend to know another and a better plan of government, which they believe might, and which therefore they think

think ought to have been executed. But as they had no title to be consulted when the plan was formed, it is a question whether they have any right to be heard now that it is put into execution: at least they ought to be cautious in offering objections against the plan of their maker, as they are not well assured of the grounds on which they proceed.

They would prefer a plan of government in which the obedience of the subject flowed from a necessary determination of the will; and think that the supreme ruler ought to be satisfied with this, in place of that obedience of free choice which he demands.—But they are not ignorant, that the obedience which flows from choice is, in all respects, more valuable, than that which flows from a necessary determination of the will; and if they have not the justice to own, that the Deity has a right to the best obedience of which they are capable, they ought to have the good sense to acknowledge, that it is vain to contend with the Almighty. And further, if they will contend this point with their maker, they ought to be sure of what they contend about: for it
is

is nonsense to call that obedience which does not flow from the will; and it is nonsense to call that the will of any being, which flows not from his own choice, but from some other cause, into which, in strictness of speech, it must be resolved.

In cases that exceed their abilities, they are assured of all the indulgence they can wish for; and in painful trials, may expect such aid and support, as will in the end redound to the honour of God, and their own unspeakable happiness, if in such trials they would give the decision where it ought to be given. — But this they do not chuse to do, and rather wish it were given for them by a necessary determination of their will. They know, that by repeated efforts, under a divine direction and influence, they may form an habit, which will make the decision almost as easy to themselves, and far more acceptable to God, than any necessary determination could be; but are not willing to put themselves to the trouble that is necessary in forming an habit. — And here the matter sticks; and this is in truth the origin of evil, both natural and moral:
nor

nor is there any possible remedy, but from correcting the will.

A parent is not satisfied with his childrens conforming to his will just so far, and no farther than suits their own inclinations; but insists on their doing some things fit for themselves, and obliging to him, to which they have no inclination at all, perhaps an aversion. A husband will not take it well that his wife manages her domestic affairs to her own liking merely; but expects she will do some things fit and reasonable to be done out of regard to him. No magistrate on earth, no constitution of government, will dispense with our checking and restraining our own inclinations from a regard to the laws. And there is not an individual but knows, that in certain cases not injurious to himself, his neighbour ought to do some things out of regard to him; and the essence of friendship consists in sacrificing our own inclinations to those of our friends; and he is not worthy of the honourable appellation who is incapable of this. But this right, so universally allowed and insisted on, we deny to him from whom we receive our life, and breath, and all things;
and

and have the extreme folly and insolence to wonder at his insisting on it : and hence comes all the muttering against the government of God, to which men are so much addicted, with the famous question about the origin of evil, which has so injudiciously exercised the learned in all ages.

We are not ignorant that the whole intention of the Deity is, to win us over from low and mean pursuits to the study and practice of that universal righteousness which constitutes the glory and felicity of a rational being; but there is a fund of wickedness in the heart of man, which, prompted and emboldened by false learning, puts him on devising plans of government better suited to his liking, and proves the source of all those hard thoughts, and injurious speeches, against the supreme ruler, wherein curious people have so long indulged themselves.

Some alledge an incapacity in man to conform to the plan of God, or to perform any act of obedience beyond what suits his own inclination; and in support of this opinion, men have run into strange speculations about interested and disinterested
love

love of God, and of virtue, with which we have no concern: but for the satisfaction of those who are willing to take the trouble of reconciling themselves to the service of God, we will shew, that if (with the help of God) they persist in the practice of their duty from the principles of which they are already possessed, they shall, in due time, attain those generous principles of which they find themselves destitute; for the love of virtue for its own inherent excellence, is not only attainable, but unavoidable, to one who conducts himself by the principles of common sense, and common honesty, in the service of God. And for the truth of this assertion, I appeal to the common practice of men in all other professions, and to the well-known principles of the human mind.

Is there any number of men who engage in any way of life, or useful employment, from any other than selfish principles? and is there any number of those who engage in this manner, who are not in time so far reconciled to the way of life they have pursued, as to prefer it, not only to mere idleness, but to any other occupa-

tion? Exceptions there are on this, and on all other subjects; but, these admitted, it will be found a general law of nature, that men contract a liking to every useful and laudable way of life they have pursued with steadiness. The attachments men have, even to frivolous occupations they have long practised, is truly surprising: and if you will look to those who have been engaged in the fine, or even in the useful arts, but especially to those who have been occupied in a way of life that gives full exercise to their nobler powers, and calls forth every generous sentiment of the human soul, you will find them adhere to it with vast delight, from a sense they have of its own excellence. They are not fools enough to disregard the profit or honour that may attend it; but, independent of that, they feel, and you may see in them, a true and steady, and strong attachment to the business for its own sake; and to say, or insinuate, that the worship and obedience of God is less fit to attract, engage, and fix the heart of man, is a most injurious slander.

Do you think it possible for a young person to resign himself to the direction of

a wife and good parent, tutor, or master, and persist in a conformity to his injunctions, without contracting a love to the service he is engaged in? If the child, or pupil, or servant, yield an aukward and forced obedience, and will not take the trouble of reconciling his mind to his duty, he never will love his master or his service: but this creates no difficulty to him who devotes himself to the service of God; because he may expect the assistance of God in conquering his will; and if he persists in doing his duty, till, with the help of God, he has got the better of his wrong inclinations, he cannot fail of loving God with all his heart, and soul, and strength, and of being devoted to the practice of virtue on account of its own inherent excellence.

This whole subject, then, which has furnished so many perplexing questions to the curious, resolves itself into this: That if we persist in the service of God, from a regard to our own safety and happiness, we shall, in due time, serve him from a more generous principle; for this is the constitution of nature, which takes

place in all other occupations, and cannot fail to take place in religion.

Would men, in judging of religion, regulate themselves by the same maxims of good sense by which they proceed in all other important concerns, they might easily get clear of many perplexities, and find their way surprisingly plain. No subject hath been more involved in thorny questions, than the aid and support we expect from God in aspiring to the virtuous character, and no subject is more level to common sense. Without regard to the ample declarations of grace, and repeated promises of countenance, direction, and aid, made in the gospel-revelation, we have, from the simple authority of reason and good sense, encouragement in aspiring to the virtuous character, beyond what any one can pretend to in any the most laudable and useful course of life to which he is devoted. The husbandman knows, that without the influence of heaven, he is as incapable of raising a single grain of wheat or barley by all his labour, as he is of giving life to an animal. Nevertheless, he plies his business, in a just dependence upon Providence, with unremitting

mitting industry;—and so ought we. The husbandman believes, that God might, if he so pleased, raise a plentiful crop of corn without his labour; but if he is not a fool indeed, will not slacken his labour on this account:—neither ought we. The husbandman knows that he must labour hard, or perish with hunger;—and we, in like manner, may know, if we will, that we must either give the utmost application in acquiring the virtuous character, or perish yet more miserably.

If to produce the utmost possible degree of moral perfection be the ultimate end and object of the divine government, then the whole system of nature, with every movement of every part, must be in favour of him who aspires to virtue; and if indeed he believes what many seem to doubt of, that God does govern the world, and puts a higher value on the virtuous character than on all his other works, he may assure himself of all the encouragement, countenance, and aid, he can reasonably wish for. Let every one, therefore, deal plainly with himself, and know whether he is desirous of reconciling his will to the plan of God. No man who
aspires

aspires to the virtuous character, hath the least occasion to perplex himself with questions about the assistance he may need; for the business does not stick at this, but at a secret aversion to the plan of God, that is unworthy of a man of sense and spirit.

To imagine, to hope, or to cherish, the most distant expectation, that the all-perfect ruler will depart from the wise and just measures of his government, in compliance with the silly, unjust, and impious desires of unreasonable men, is an high pitch of folly and presumption. The wisest, the best, and the happiest thing that men can do, is to sacrifice their own unrighteous will to the will of God, labouring, by every mean in their power, to reconcile themselves thoroughly to his plan.

BOOK

B O O K VI.

Of Moral Obligation.

C H A P. I.

It is nonsense to doubt our obligation to behave with propriety towards every intelligent being with whom we are connected.

THE power of custom, in reconciling the mind to measures, however absurd, which are become familiar, is almost incredible. Should an Indian, or Persian, of good sense, be told, that for some time past, men of greatest eminence in the learned world had been employed in disputing with one another about the reality of virtue and vice; whether, for instance, the obligations to justice, temperance, gratitude, were nominal, fictitious, and fanciful; or whether we were indeed bound to the practice of these, and such like virtues; that volumes had been written on both sides, a deep attention given to the controversy, and

and that each hypothesis had its votaries: would the foreigner give credit to this report? Would he not suspect some design of imposing on his credulity, and either consider the whole as a banter, or persuade himself, that some mysterious meaning must be hid under so strange a narration? Or if, at last, he does admit the fact, how great must his amazement be! He must have strange ideas of the opponents; nor would he much less wonder at the defenders of virtue, and entertain a violent suspicion of the prevalence of ignorance or barbarism in the whole body of the people. Yet this conduct, so unaccountable to a foreigner, hath been continued among us without much notice. The subject, it is true, merited the strictest attention: the researches on both sides were curious enough; acquisitions of some value were made in the abstract sciences; the audacity of one side seemed to require a check, and the zeal of the other was at least pardonable: but in good earnest, might not that zeal, that acuteness, penetration, and compass of thought, have been employed with greater propriety and to more advantage? Was there
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any occasion at all for such disquisitions? Must metaphysicians, and subtle disputants, be called in to evince our obligation to do the right and shun the wrong? Can we, without renouncing common sense, be ignorant, doubtful, or even insensible to such obligations? There is need, great need, to awaken, revive, and inforce them; but without the influence of false learning, there could be no room to doubt what every man of common understanding does, and must perceive, at first sight.

If two objects fall at once under your eye, you cannot avoid perceiving the relation of height and distance they stand in to each other; and will, without the help of reasoning, immediately pronounce upon that relation. Suppose, then, two intelligent beings in certain relations, or connections, one to another, can you possibly avoid perceiving certain regards reciprocally due from one to the other? Let them be superiors and inferiors, patrons and clients, benefactors and beneficiaries; or, if you will, let them be supposed equal in all respects, and independent: yet if there is any conceivable relation or con-

nection, a regard suited to that relation or connection must be due from the one to the other. Now, the moment what is due from one intelligent being to another appears, (and this in many cases is obvious), obligation is acknowledged. The idea of mine and thine is as inseparable from intelligent beings, in relation and connection with one another, as the idea of form is inseparable from substance. Setting aside houses, lands, money, and the like subjects of property, or supposing all these to be in common, you cannot possibly avoid the idea of something which of right belongs to every individual; and must therefore be acknowledged due to him from every one with whom he is connected. That every one ought to have his own, and that no one ought to invade or with-hold the right of another, are propositions as self-evident, as little subject to doubt, as incapable of proof, and as truly axioms, in the strict sense, as any of those that are the first principles of science.

There are obligations innumerable arising from a variety of relations and connections, not easy to be discovered or determined

inined with exactness; about which wise and good men may be mistaken or ill informed, and to the knowledge of which a nice discussion is often necessary: but obligations arising from obvious relations, are objects of common sense. They may be overlooked, or not fully attended to, as is common with the objects of our external senses; but, fairly proposed to the mind, must be assented to by every one who is endued with the understanding of a man.

We must distinguish with care betwixt a disposition to fulfil obligations, and a capacity of perceiving them. Bad men are destitute of the one, not of the other. An acute understanding, matched with a bad heart, will do much to puzzle and perplex the plainest cases; but to eradicate all sense of duty, is impracticable, without destroying that perception of obvious truth which is the characteristic of the rational mind.

If you acknowledge any person to be possessed of valuable qualities, you find yourself bound to regard him with corresponding sentiments; to esteem his wisdom, admire his magnanimity, reverence

his piety, chastity, and sobriety, and love him for his candour and generous benevolence. To say that a man is possessed of amiable qualities, and not love him in proportion to the qualities he possesses, or that he is of a respectable character, and not pay him the reverence that is due, is a palpable absurdity, and shocks common sense. Should you receive no benefit yourself from these virtues, yet cannot you dispense with your obligation to pay him these regards. And if he has conferred favours, a return of gratitude proportioned to the value of the favours conferred, and the disinterested benevolence of the benefactor, becomes a debt of the strictest kind the mind can conceive.

Will it be necessary to insist on gratitude, and the obviousness of that obligation? Whatever be the disposition of the heart, none but mere idiots need to be told, that generous deeds, flowing from kind intention, are intitled to a return of equal, and, if possible, of greater generosity; and that gratitude is a debt of the strictest kind. Men may qualify, lessen, and endeavour all they can to evade this debt, or palliate their injustice in not paying

ing it, as they often do with other debts; but scarce can you find a man so impudent, and so void of all sense of right, as to deny the obligation of gratitude. In fine, to acknowledge any thing is due, and to hesitate about your obligation to pay it, shocks common sense equally with this assertion, A thing may be, and may not be, at the same time. Multitudes are so hurried through life by keen passions, so full of the objects of their various pursuits, and so blinded by their attachment to them; that, in many instances, they need to be put in mind of these, and many other obligations: but they need only to be reminded; for moral obligation of every kind is an object of common sense, as plainly perceived, if not felt as sensibly, as other objects are by our external senses. However near men may approach to the state of mere animals, yet they cannot totally divest themselves of that sense of things which belongs to their rank. Set the object before them, and they will pronounce, faintly perhaps, and with hesitation, but they will pronounce, in all plain cases, like other men.

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Were it possible to make the supreme being the object of sense, no human creature would need to be put in mind of his obligations to worship and obey him. And if you conceive it possible, that our dependence on God, and obligations to worship and obey him, should at any time be made as palpable to the rational mind as objects of sense are to our bodily organs; it is easy to foresee the light in which irreligion must then appear; nor can the most thoughtless and inconsiderate be at any time altogether ignorant, that we ought to adore a being of absolute perfection, to express the warmest gratitude to our chief benefactor, to love him for his goodness, confide in his wisdom, faithfulness, and fatherly affection, dread his power and justice, and submit to his authority.

To believe there is a God, who made, upholds, and governs, the whole system of nature, and conducts all events, bestows numberless degrees of happiness upon numberless beings, on us in particular; to believe this, and at the same time to deny him that worship and obedience which is due, or not to worship and obey him

him to the best of our ability, is the groffest of all absurdities, and a species too of iniquity of the most atrocious kind.

If any duty can bear dispute, it must be that we owe to ourselves: for here it may be said, we sustain two characters, opposite and incompatible, of sovereign and subject, debtor and creditor; and must be supposed capable of cancelling at pleasure such obligations, if any such there be. Here then is a knot fit enough to exercise the skill of a mere logician, but dissolved at once by the authority of common sense. In nothing are mankind more agreed, than in what every one owes to himself. Men of spirit especially have a quick sense of this obligation. To reproach ourselves, is common language; and never to forgive ourselves, is not uncommon. The pain which one suffers upon having betrayed his interest, or his honour, by mean compliances, gives a full proof of the reality of this obligation; and of the difficulty, nay impossibility, of cancelling it. The man who has ruined himself at play, knows well what he owes to himself; and also knows how to punish his own folly; and is exquisitely ingenious in

in taking vengeance on himself; and seldom is capable of evading the sentence of his own mind, or pacifying his enraged thoughts. There are well-known instances of those who, to escape this severest of all punishments, have attempted, as it were, to dismiss themselves from being. This fact deserves particular notice, not only as it gives full confirmation of the truth we insist on, but a lively representation also, and a kind of presage, of a yet greater misery awaiting bad men in another state of existence.

There are, it must be owned, multitudes unhappily skilled in making up matters with themselves. If their baseness is hid from the sight of men, or, what sometimes happens, if it is made light of by the world, they feel little disturbance from within. But should they, from insensibility, artifice, or a multiplicity of occupations, get rid of the censure of their own minds; yet can they not secure themselves against the terrors of a higher tribunal. Every one knows what is due from a servant to his master; and every one must acknowledge, that he who gave him being hath a right to his service; and all
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who have tolerably just ideas of the divine government, must, in some degree, be aware of the danger of abusing or neglecting the powers and faculties wherewith they are intrusted. They who are masters themselves, or have under their authority those whose duty it is to hold themselves in readiness to receive their orders, and execute their commands, know well how to reproach, to punish, and often with severity enough, those their inferiors, who, by debauchery, sloth, and intemperance of any kind, disqualify themselves for the duties of their station. Now, from what they feel upon these occasions, they may, if they will, judge of their own situation with Almighty God; if they do believe, that there is a God who governs the world. Let the influence of bad education, example, and habit, the perversion of judgement, and insensibility of heart, to which men are subject, be ever so great, and in many it is prodigious, still the baseness and iniquity of such behaviour is manifest; and no wit, no artifice, no sophistical reasoning, can baffle the judgement of common sense, if one judges at all on so plain a subject.

C H A P. II.

It is nonsense to doubt our obligation to serve God with the ability we have, and apply to him for what we have not.

HE must be a stranger to the state of learning in modern times, who is unacquainted with the injury done to the interest of religion and virtue, by shocking views of the divine œconomy, necessarily arising from a controversy about our natural powers, in which divines and philosophers have been keenly engaged for some centuries past; and he widely mistakes the design of this Appeal, who expects we should enter into this controversy, or pay it any regard.

A connection betwixt obligation, and power to fulfil the obligation, is apparent; and so inviolable, that if you set aside the latter, the former vanishes of course. In all contracts, and without an express contract, it is understood, that whoever fails in fulfilling his obligation, underlies the penalty; but who ever thought any per-
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son under an obligation to do what he hath not power to do? Madmen, and tyrants, who are often mad enough, may insist on obligations to perform impossibilities; but that learned men should maintain a subtile debate on any such supposition, is unaccountable. There is not only an apparent and inviolable connection betwixt power and obligation; but the last is commensurate to the first: which, by the by, lays the learned under an obligation to make mankind acquainted with the extent of their powers; because, in proportion to them, they shall be accountable to him from whom they are derived. The scriptures, which are the true, if not the only, source of sound philosophy and good sense, on these subjects, tell us, that he who gained ten talents, was rewarded in proportion to the subject committed to him, and his industry in improving it; and that he who gained five talents, received in like manner a reward proportioned to his fidelity and industry; and he who had received but one talent, was not overlooked, but punished with severity for not making the improvement that was due and expected. We are told, that this wicked and

lothful servant endeavoured to excuse or extenuate his fault by giving an injurious and shocking character of his master; but in place of a needless defence, and frivolous dispute, on so plain a subject, we find, that the source of the calumny is pointed out, and a suitable punishment awarded him. This single parable one would have thought sufficient to have prevented the learned from making a question of our power to fulfil the obligations we are under, and the mischief arising from this question; but false learning always hath been the enemy of religion and virtue.

It is apparent, that if common sense had been consulted, a controversy of the most pernicious kind might have been wholly prevented, or soon stopped; and if men will yet pay the regard that is due to common sense, they shall find themselves relieved from embarrassments they have always complained of, and see the whole of religion rise to their view, in that obvious, plain, and pleasant light, in which the face of nature appears, when freed from those mists and clouds by which it was obscured.

A gentleman calls upon his butler, and informs him of his expecting company to dinner, and bids him provide a proper entertainment. The servant, as you may suppose, is an idle fellow, and forgets his masters orders, or neglects to put them into execution. The company is met, and behold there is no dinner, or a poor and scanty one. The gentleman (as may well be believed) is in high displeasure, and enters into a conversation with his servant; every particular of which will deserve our attention. — Whence comes it that you have not provided the entertainment I gave orders for? — You gave orders for a handsome entertainment, but did not supply me with money sufficient for the purpose. — Do not you know that I have money enough for all my occasions? or did you think I would require you to provide my table without furnishing you with money? — I was shy of giving you trouble about the money I wanted. — What! shy of troubling me about my own affairs, and where you could not but know that my honour was concerned! or did you think I would grudge the expence that was necessary for my own entertainment,

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and the entertainment of my friends? — Sir, I would not have failed to have obeyed your commands if it had been in my power; but the money in my hands was far from sufficient, and I did not look upon it as my business to provide more.——Here the conversation must end; and every one sees the treatment the servant may look for from a man of sense and spirit: for a fellow of this kind cannot be borne with in any well-regulated family.

Few have the boldness to treat Almighty God as this servant does his master; but numbers act on the same principles: and the same sentiments may be gathered from the hard speeches which many let fall from their mouths concerning the divine œconomy; and, what is yet more to be complained of, such sentiments are interspersed in all the writings of the learned upon this subject; though there is not a single thought of this insolent servant, that, stripped of the learned language with which it is disguised, would not give a prodigious shock to a man of sense. And now, if men will all at once dismiss this scandalous talk, and listen to
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common sense, they will see, in the clearest, strongest, and most satisfying light, the obligations they are under to employ the powers they have, however inconsiderable these powers may be, and to apply to God for what they want, in the firm belief of being supplied; and on this solid foundation, may go on to build the superstructure of a virtuous practice, that will redound in the issue to the honour of God, and their own unspeakable benefit.

An accurate delineation of the powers of nature would, as has been observed, be of great service to mankind: but till the learned are pleased to favour us with this, every one may, from his own observation and experience, (which, after all, is his surest and best information), discover what he can, and what he cannot do; and what, therefore, God expects and requires of him, and what he is bound to ask and expect from God.

C H A P. III.

To ask, or expect, that God should enable us to do what he hath already put in our power to do, is folly and presumption.

Notwithstanding our aversion to frivolous disputes about obvious truth, something must be done to give satisfaction concerning a self-determining power; otherwise all that has been said, or can be said, in favour of virtue, must go for nothing; because all men, learned and unlearned, bigots or freethinkers, are not merely sceptical, but infidels, with regard to the reality of this power.

Take one of the vulgar aside; and point out to him some duties he neglects, which he might perform with great ease, or little trouble, and some vices he indulges, which he might correct with equal ease, or with as little trouble; and if he is a man of ingenuity, he will acknowledge the fact: but if you press him to correct these vices, and perform those duties, he will say many plausible things concerning his obligation so to do; but will conclude, that till
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God work it in him, he can do nothing; which you must take as a full answer to all you have said, or can say, and a declaration abundantly significant, that all your labour is lost.

If you betake yourself to men of liberal education, you will find them disposed to treat the notions of the vulgar with great ridicule, and steadily assert a self-determining power. And if you enumerate the vices which may be corrected, and the duties which may be performed, with great ease, or very little trouble, by the exercise of this self-determining power, they will agree with you, that in these, and many like cases, men have power to do more than they actually do. But if you give the least hint of your expecting, that any number of men should, in any case whatever, exert this power, and produce this reformation, they will consider you as a visionary, and positively affirm, that you have no ground to expect any such thing. They will not say, with the vulgar, that till God work it in them they can do nothing; but will assert, that the power already conferred is not sufficient; and that without some impulse of some kind or o-

ther, it is vain to expect, that men should sacrifice their inclinations to their duty, however weak the inclination, or however important the duty may be; for in reality they have no belief in a self-determining power in any case whatever. The vulgar are taught to say, that they are not stocks or stones; but they are also taught to say, that till God work it in them, they can do nothing; which amounts to the same thing, as if they had believed they were as incapable of determining themselves as a stock or a stone. Men of education are taught to say, that they have a self-determining power, and in certain cases can cross their inclinations with great ease, or very little trouble; but are made to believe, that in no case whatever can they act against the prevailing inclination, without being determined by some impulse of some kind or other; which is in reality to deny the self-determining power they seem to acknowledge. People of education are liberal of their censures upon the absurdities and contradictions of the vulgar, without observing that they themselves run into the same absurdities and contradictions: for
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after all their talk about a self-determining power, it is evident, that both learned and unlearned are infidels with respect to this power; and therefore resolve to persist in those vices to which they are addicted, until some how or other they are impelled to set about a reformation.

In vain would you apply to free-thinkers for a remedy of this evil; because, though they, of all men, ought to be above vulgar prejudices, they are the greatest slaves to them we know; and in place of destroying, bend all the force of their genius to give them credit and authority. And Mr Hume, who is well intitled to an high rank amongst this class of men, has undertaken a demonstration, that there neither is, nor can be, any evidence of a self-determining power.

To offer a proof of the reality of a power of which we are conscious, is a folly not inferior to that of proving the reality of matter and motion; but every man of sense and probity ought to take the following plain truths under consideration.

When we cannot be ignorant that God expects, and requires, we should give the

determination against inclination, and in favour of duty, and are conscious to ourselves, that he has put us into a capacity of doing it; to expect in that case that he should interpose, and, on that supposition, to put off giving the determination which we know we ought and can give, in hopes of an interposition which may happen, but which we have no ground to expect, is not only insolent, and undutiful, but extremely foolish. It is a like folly, and attended with consequences of the same kind, with the folly of those who neglect the duties of their calling, in hopes of some great estates falling to them, or of some lucky turn of affairs, by which they shall be made rich in an instant.

To alledge the necessity of an interposition which we have no reason to expect, and which one in an hundred is not favoured with, is an heinous impiety; for it amounts to nothing less than a declaration, that the supreme being looks on, and sees ninety and nine of an hundred perish for want of an interposition which is necessary to determine them to do the right, and shun the wrong: and to pretend to justify, excuse, or extenuate, our neglects

neglects of duty by this alledged necessity of an interposition, or impulse, to determine our will, is a heinous aggravation of our fault.

This belief of the necessity of an impulse, or interposition, with which the minds of men of all ranks are so deeply tainted, is one of the most pernicious errors, and one of the most plentiful sources of vice and folly known in modern times. For though there are of the species who would not give themselves the smallest trouble to be wise or good, there are many more who would correct certain faults, and supply certain defects in their character, if they believed themselves capable of doing so. And we will defy any man to account for defects in the character of many well-disposed persons which they do not supply, and faults which they do not correct, but from the false notions about impulses and interpositions which prevail so universally, and are so early imbibed. A remedy for this evil is much to be desired, but not easy to be found; for the subject is too plain for reasoning, and men have not yet learned to pay the regard that is due to the obvious dictates
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of scripture and common sense. The parable of the talents, and the comparison made of the kingdom of God to a grain of mustard-seed, is worthy the perusal of every one, whether Christian or Infidel; because these passages of scripture contain more truth and good sense, than all the volumes that ever were, or will be, written on this subject. And if a man has the probity and good sense to believe, that he is accountable for a power of self-determination of which he is possessed, however small his power may be, and also entertains so favourable an opinion of the supreme ruler, as to believe, and expect, that upon his exerting the capacity wherewith he is endued, of doing right and shunning wrong, he will augment his capacity; let him try to bring his belief into practice, and he shall soon find the good effect of the experiment.

Supposing a man has no inclination, but an aversion rather to acts of devotion; yet if he finds, that with great ease, or no great trouble, he could step into his closet, and shut the door behind him, and pray to his Father in secret; let him do it, and he will find the good effect of the experiment:

periment: and the oftener he tries it, the effect will be the greater. Supposing he has no inclination, but an aversion rather to parting with a shilling, a sixpence, or even a penny, to a needy person; yet if he knows he ought, and finds in his heart that he can do it, let him do it. And if he does it with the belief and expectation that God will enlarge his heart, his heart shall be enlarged; and still the more, the longer he persists in this attempt. If a man finds an inclination to take a share in the impertinent conversation which at the bottom of his heart he condemns, but finds at the same time that he can bridle his tongue; let him do it, and he will disengage himself; and the oftener he observes this rule, will disengage himself with greater ease and pleasure. The same may be said with regard to drinking the other glass, which he believes he ought to forbear: and indeed the same may be said with regard to almost all the vices in which men indulge themselves, without sense or feeling, through a false notion that they cannot, and therefore are not, strictly speaking, bound to correct them; for prodigious changes
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may be made to the advantage in mens tempers and manners, if they had the good sense to believe plain truths, and the honesty to practise what they believe. In severe trials, they would need, and they would find, the interposition and impulse they expect; but in common cases, where God has already endued them with the capacity of doing his will, if they shall acquit themselves with any degree of fidelity, and trust in him, he will augment their powers. But, on the other hand, if, under silly pretences of inability, or phantastical expectations of impulses, a man neglects to do what he knows in his conscience he ought, and finds he can do, what opinion shall we form of his character? or what judgement shall we make of his fate? To expect that this man would acquit himself with fidelity in fore trials, or in cases where he is under a strong inclination to the right, with an equally strong impulse to the wrong; to expect that he should, from a regard to his duty, maintain the struggle with his wrong inclinations, and give the decision in favour of his duty; or in any case whatever, to expect that this man shall
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acquit himself to God or man, from a pure principle of religion or virtue, is manifestly absurd. And on the supposition that the Deity pays any regard to mens good or ill behaviour, it would be no less absurd to expect, that he would favour such an one with a new impulse, to determine him to do that which he has already furnished him with sufficient abilities and sufficient motives to perform; for though the Deity may interpose at any time, or in any manner, as to him seems meet; yet, in the present case, there is no ground to expect a favourable interposition, but the contrary.

If a man will not take the smallest trouble to perform that act of piety towards God, or of justice or charity to men, which he knows he ought, and finds he can perform; or if he will not give himself the least trouble to check those wrong inclinations, which he knows he ought, and finds he can check; what is to be expected? What judgement shall we make of such a character and conduct on any known principles of religion or morality? Or what may we expect as the final issue of such behaviour on the principles of

common sense? What a good God may do for those who see their error, and are in a disposition to correct it, is not easy to say; but the fate of those who are of an opposite disposition, is apparent. What can we expect, but what we see actually happens, that they shall go on to the end of their lives, amusing themselves with speculations about religion and morality, without the least pretence to a religious or moral character?

As far as they are impelled by temper and circumstances to good actions, they may be very serviceable; and as far as they are impelled to bad actions, they will be equally disserviceable, to the interest of society and of mankind, and to their own interest. They shall, whether they will or not, be made subservient to the end of the divine government, as all created beings are; but that, in this life or the next, they should be treated as subjects of the kingdom of God, is inconsistent with all the ideas we have of religion from reason or revelation.

If there is such a thing as rebellion against lawful authority, and if we can form any idea of a rebel, we must conclude

clude all those as rebels against the government of God. He who neglects a known duty, or violates a known obligation of religion or morality, through the insinuating influence of some strong inclination, or the impetuous impulse of some violent passion, is no doubt liable to be punished as a rebel, provided he has it in his power to resist the force of his wrong bias.—But rebellion in this case is less atrocious than in the other. In the latter case, great regard will be had to the pain of maintaining a struggle against such powerful resistance; and great mitigation will take place, in proportion to the pain of the struggle: but in the former case, where the pain is next to none, and the disobedience flows from mere neglect, there is no room for mitigation. And if the rebellion is persisted in, for no other reason than that the disobedient person will not take the trouble to approve himself a dutiful subject, he shall be considered as a determined rebel, and treated as an enemy to the divine government.

And as this is the known case of great numbers of the human kind, is it fit to

be passed over? Can their brethren of mankind, their particular friends especially, and near relations, or can they, whether divines or philosophers, who profess such regard for the virtue and happiness of mankind, look on this character with indifference? Can any thing be more cruel, than to cherish the expectations of impulses, which these people have no title to expect, and which not one of a thousand ever met with? Can any thing be more foolish, and cruel at the same time, than to puzzle and confound them with endless frivolous disputes about liberty and necessity, when you may and ought to tell them plainly, that they are sliding insensibly into a state of determined impiety, vice, and misery, by the neglect of powers they certainly are possessed of, and of which they *know* themselves to be possessed? Perhaps they would not alter their course though their danger were told them ever so plainly. — But perhaps they would; and no man has a title to pronounce on the part they would act till the experiment is fairly made. Till divines and philosophers have abated their ardour for frivolous inquiries, and learned the art of turning

turning the attention of mankind to obvious and interesting truth, they have no title to complain of the unthinking part of mankind; for one may be bold to affirm, that multitudes would act a better part than they do, if they were under a better treatment.

It may be alledged, that however easy it is to practise certain duties, and forbear certain vices, once and again, it is not easy, nor indeed practicable, without a divine direction and support, to persist in that course of action till a habit is formed.—Nor indeed is it. But that needs be no discouragement to one to do what he knows he ought and can do. For if he proceeds on the Christian plan, he will find himself under the direction and tuition of one on whom he can absolutely depend. And even on the plan of simple Theism, he may and ought to believe, that moral perfection is the ultimate end and object of the divine government; and therefore, as has already been observed, that every movement of the system is in favour of him who makes it his study to conform to the will of the supreme ruler.

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Did men in good earnest believe, that this world, and all things in it, are under the direction and government of an all-wise, all-powerful, all-gracious God, who consults the welfare of his creatures, and by every suggestion from within, and every dispensation of his providence from without, intends their advancement in virtue and happiness; and could they be prevailed on to resign themselves to him, and, as dutiful and docile children, do the little he hath already enabled them to do, in expectation of further direction and aid; they could not fail reaching that perfection of virtue and happiness for which they were originally designed: but men lose sight of God as a moral governor, are not faithful in using the powers wherewith they are intrusted, and are not so confident as they ought to be of getting additional powers, on the due improvement of the powers they have. — And hence arise the many errors they run into in the conduct of their lives.

C H A P. IV.

To aim at becoming truly wise and good, without a continual dependence on a divine direction and influence, is a vain and chimerical project.

None but the ignorant and bigotted can be insensible of the value of those many dissertations and discourses on religion and morality, with which the public has been favoured of late; and yet, upon an attentive survey of the whole, it may be questioned, whether they are so well fitted to promote the end designed as might in reason have been expected. The great duties of life have been stated with perspicuity, and enforced by motives and considerations so just and rational, that if one will hearken to reason, he must assent; and if he will be ruled by reason, he must comply. But if a man should be unreasonable, (here lies the defect), all this labour is in a great measure lost; and no remedy seems to be thought of for the well-known folly of mankind.

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A man is addicted to avarice, vanity, or indolence : What would you propose ? — Point out another and a better course. — That is certainly right ; but he is not disposed to follow it. — Urge him by motives, arguments, and weighty considerations. — But neither will that be sufficient. His bent lies another way, rooted in nature, and confirmed by habit. — You advise him to exert the strength he has, whatever it may be, putting his trust in God, and assure him of success. — This is very good ; but still the difficulty remains ; the man is unwilling. From whatever cause this unwillingness comes, it is a well-known fact ; and until some effectual remedy is found for it, your labour is lost. Let this be done, and all goes well ; but without this, every other attempt proves abortive.

Propositions on other subjects that are rational, meet with a different reception. Give the covetous an hint about gain, and you command his will. Point out the path of preferment to the ambitious, and he will not be stopped by difficulties. The hero takes fire at difficulties and dangers, and flies to the mark of honour, as a hawk

to her game. Where a previous disposition is competently strong, it is easy to put men in motion; but where that is wanting, or weak, arguments from utility, from dignity, from satisfaction of the highest kind, and even from necessity, will hardly prevail.

With what difficulty are the vulgar, of all ranks, prevailed on to quit the way of life to which they have been long accustomed? Let the change proposed be ever so fit, and urged by arguments that are unanswerable, it avails not. They have not judgement, or they have not candour, to do justice to your arguments; or they want that regard to right, and even to their own interest, which is necessary to determine them. One is often tempted to think, that they have not the power of self-determination. But that is not the case: for they have the power, but will not use it. If you have the address to bring about their will but so far as to make a few essays or experiments, they will shew themselves possessed of all the powers which belong to moral agents; but till that is done, you can have no success. It is thus in the common affairs

of life; and it is thus in the concerns of religion and virtue. And may not the overlooking, or not paying due attention to this plain phenomenon, be one of the chief obstructions to the success of our eminent divines and philosophers? Give me where to fix my foot, said Archimedes, and I will move the whole world; and give us a willing mind, say modern divines and philosophers, and we will convert all mankind.

Let us not say, however, that their labours are lost; for they have done good, though not all the good that might have been done, or may yet be done, under a better direction. A man who is naturally disposed to the practice of virtue, will, as far as his natural disposition goes, yield to their reasonings and instructions; but if there is any one duty to which he has a natural aversion, (which is the case of many), or if he has a strong reluctance to the practice of those virtues which oppose his natural temper, (which is the case of all in whom the virtuous habit is not formed), he is not to be won by reasoning, or prevailed on by the strongest arguments, to alter his course. He may, and he ought, to be reasoned with; but reasoning

reasoning will not produce the desired effect. He ought to be required to struggle with his wrong inclinations; but he will not: nor ought you to expect that he should. Till divines and philosophers are better skilled in touching the springs of the human heart than they are, or affect to appear, they cannot reach the end they propose. And were they possessed of all the eloquence of Greece and Rome, they could not accomplish what they ought to have in view; I mean, to save those from ruin who will not take the trouble of saving themselves; and in order thereto, to correct and cure the inveterate folly of the human heart. There is something here that demands a deeper attention than has been given it; something too that points at a method of forming mankind to virtue, which has been too much neglected.

A wise parent will not trust the virtue of his child to wise rules, wholesome advices, and solid reasonings; but when he sends him out into the world, will provide him a tutor, if he can afford the expence, and one too of fidelity and capacity, who will watch his behaviour, give timely information of danger, check his

forwardness, stimulate his good dispositions, urge him to his duty, and, in one word, form and train him with judgment and tenderness. He will not trust the good conduct of his son to the impressions he can make on his heart by good advices; though this he will not neglect: but at parting, will put full in his view the ability, fidelity, and good disposition of his tutor, with the need he has of his advice, and the dangerous consequences of acting presumptuously, or undutifully, towards him; and will lay more stress on possessing his son with a just sense of all these things, than on any other method he could take to form his conduct. Here then is a model fit to be copied by divines and philosophers, and by all who undertake the arduous task of forming mankind to virtue.

The human race, those especially who have not yet attained the virtuous character, and even they who have, ought to be considered in the same light with thoughtless, giddy, forward youth, whose natural bent is to pleasure, and who do not love restraint. Directions, advices, persuasives to virtue, however rational, just, and

and forcible, are the same to them as to young people whom you would engage in a severe course of study: nor is your prospect of success one whit more certain in the one case than in the other; but in both, the wisest and most effectual measures ought to be pursued. To put mankind, then, under a divine direction and influence, ought to be the chief aim of all our instructors in religion and virtue; for without doing so, all their other prescriptions will be found insufficient, and indeed a mere project; which, like the alleged possibility of moving the whole world, labours under an essential defect.

To say nothing of those self-sufficient sophists, who, with the true air of empirics, traduce religion and its teachers, and offer their nostrums as the only remedy for the vices and disorders of mankind, there are philosophers who profess a reverence for religion, and divines whose cordial attachment to its interests is unquestionable, who, though they never affirmed the sufficiency of our powers, yet in their addresses to mankind, seem to proceed on that supposition; and though they never doubted the necessity of divine aid
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and direction, yet speak of it with a reserve and timidity as if they did; and who, without any ill intention, and merely through an excess of caution, have not done justice to one of the plainest and most important doctrines of religion. Modern divines do not neglect to inculcate the doctrines of faith, any more than their predecessors neglected the doctrine of good works; but as we make no difficulty in pointing out the error of the one, so we ought, with the same frankness, to acknowledge the error of the other; and agree in this, that all such partial proceedings ought to be dismissed, and justice done to primary truths.

To avoid the imputation of enthusiasm, the great bugbear of the present times, we readily allow the fitness and necessity of employing all the probable means of becoming wise and good; but from the idea we have of man and of virtue, must think it impossible for him to reach the virtuous character, without a friend at hand to direct and urge him on; and know no friend in the universe to be depended on for this, but one; and must therefore look on every hypothesis in fa-

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vour of virtue as fantastical, that does not lead us to God.

He only is present, and intimately so, with the human mind at all times, and on all occasions; sees every spring of action, and every movement of the soul; foresees every danger, and every the most minute deviation from the standard of rectitude; and he only can make a seasonable application of the proper preventions and remedies. His wisdom and power alone are sufficient for supplying hidden defects, removing secret obstructions, and providing a necessary support in fore conflicts. He only perceives the numberless artifices employed in evading or baffling the force of plain obligations; and he alone is possessed of the skill of reconciling the will to the object of its aversion, without the least infringement of its liberty; and, let me add, he, and he alone, hath the goodness, the patience, and fatherly affection, to continue striving with so foolish and perverse a creature as man; and to him, therefore, every one who aspires to the virtuous character, ought to resign himself. The great secret, then, in forming men to religion and virtue, (if it is fit to call

call that a secret which is so palpable to common sense, and ought to have been published to all the world), is, to persuade them to resign themselves to God, as docile and dutiful pupils to a faithful and capable tutor.

There is no occasion to retract what is said about the powers of nature, because they are real, and because God will not dispense with their exercise in the acquisition of virtue; but if it is necessary to make men acquainted with the powers wherewith they are intrusted, and for which they must render an account, it is no less necessary to make them acquainted with the various dispensations of providence that have a tendency to put them on the use and application of their powers; for, as these are necessary, so for these also they must render an account.

Not only those awful dispensations of providence which do not, and cannot, escape observation, but incidents that occur daily, and have a tendency to give us other views, other sentiments, and other dispositions, than we commonly have; and not only those pungent penetrating discoveries with which we are sometimes favoured,

favoured, and are willing to ascribe to God; but every intimation concerning the right and wrong of conduct, which comes without our call or invitation, ought to be resolved into the same source. And, finally, every suggestion from within, and every circumstance of every event that comes in the course of things, that is, by the direction of the supreme ruler, and hath a tendency to reclaim us from the error of our ways, and to bring us to the obedience of the just, ought to be the object of our particular attention.

The bulk of mankind have not judgement to consider these dispensations in this light; or if they should, are not disposed to pay them due attention, and still less disposed to fall in with them; and therefore it is incumbent on the teachers of religion to point them out, and press a strict attention to them, and compliance with them, on the consciences of men; for without this, all their natural powers, were they more in number, and greater, than they are, will be no better than the gigantic strength of a coward, or the treasures of a miser.

In a word, men must not be suffered to

forget, that they are in the condition of children under age; who, trained by God, may rise to an inconceivable pitch of glory and happiness; but, left to themselves, must sink, as, alas! they commonly do, into folly, vice, and misery.

We are put under the direction and tutelage of that Holy Spirit, who, being intimately present with all, observes the manners of good and bad, and treats us as we behave towards him. “Sacer inest
“in nobis spiritus sanctus, bonorum ma-
“lorumque custos et observator; et quem-
“admodum nos illum tractamus, ita
“et ille nos.” So said a Heathen philosopher; and what a shame will it be if any of us should appear insensible to so great and important a truth?

B O O K VII.

Of Conscience.

C H A P. I.

We have a feeling, as well as perception, of moral excellence.

WE are much beholden to the generous efforts of that philosopher, who laboured to bring down moral obligation from the thin cold regions of abstract thinking, to its native seat, the human heart; but do not thank him for devising a moral sense as a supplement to the rational soul; because a feeling is not less essential to it than a perception of moral obligation.

A pure intelligence is a non-entity: for though, by abstraction, we may figure to ourselves a being endued with powers of thinking and judging, without approbation or disapprobation, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, joy or sorrow, and without any emotions or affections arising from the

object of its contemplation ; yet every one fees, that these are fictions of the brain, unsupported by any thing in nature.

It is true, we are not at liberty to ascribe to God the affections of the human mind, even the best ; but as little can we conceive him to be an indifferent spectator of what passes in the world ; for the enjoyment he hath of the works of his hand, the delight, and the complacency, with which he looks on those who bear his image, and the tendernefs, and pity, and kind concern, he hath for all who are capable of happiness and misery, with his irreconcilable aversion to moral evil, transcend all our feelings, as much as the heavens are above the earth, or rather, as finite is surpassed by infinite. It is difficult for us to form a judgement of the sentiments even of created spirits who are not incumbered with flesh and blood as we are, nor have their rational powers interrupted and impeded in their exercise by that variety of objects with which we are surrounded ; but we must believe, that they have sentiments and affections corresponding to their perception of interesting truth ; and as their rational powers have
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freer scope, we must also believe, that their perceptions and feelings have a more exact correspondence with the truth of things than ours.

With regard to the human species, you cannot conceive a man contemplating order, beauty, dignity, or utility, in any object, without a degree of satisfaction proportioned to the view he has of the object. Nor can you conceive him contemplating meanness, misery, disorder, or deformity, without a proportional dissatisfaction. Nor is it possible to conceive, that a thinking being should not affect what gives him delight, and fly from that which breeds disgust or dissatisfaction. Without having recourse to emotions or affections of the instinctive kind, you must always suppose, that rational perception is accompanied with rational feeling in some degree. Or if, by abstraction, as I said, you make a separation, and figure to yourself a being in the exercise of the one without the other, you must, upon reflection, be satisfied, that it is a mere chimera, or creature of imagination; for you will find nothing in nature to justify your idea. There are instances of mens
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having a lively sense of some objects, with a total insensibility to others equally affecting; and there are instances of those who have a clear perception of some truths, with a blindness to others equally obvious: and both are to be considered as disorders to which the human mind is liable, and chargeable for most part on our own misconduct, or mismanagement of ourselves. There are also a few who seem to view all objects with equal insensibility; and there are a few who either are, or appear to be, sceptics with regard to truths the most obviously manifest: but these are monsters, that ought to be set aside in judging of human nature.

It is worthy of notice, that mankind have a disinterested love of truth and justice, of benevolence and piety. The philosopher who sacrificed an hecatomb, in a transport of joy, on the discovery of truth, and the insensibility which Archimedes showed to his being run through the body when deeply engaged in study, are strong testimonies to the truth of this doctrine. But we have no occasion to found on such far-fetched testimony; because we have multitudes among ourselves
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who employ a great part of their lives, with no small satisfaction, in the contemplation of truths wherein they are no otherwise interested than as rational beings. Nor is this disposition confined to men of letters, or to a small number of choice spirits: for the rudest of mankind have an insatiable thirst after knowledge, with a prodigious delight in the discovery of truth, of moral truth especially; and will feed on narrations which concern the right and wrong of conduct with delight, far superior to what they feel from pleasant meats and drinks. These are emotions and affections, not of this or the other individual, constituted in this or the other manner, but common to the human race; and ought to be carefully marked and distinguished from those virtuous affections of the instinctive kind with which some people are favoured; because they are the only solid foundation on which to raise a character thoroughly virtuous.

Like all our other intellectual powers, our moral feelings, as well as perceptions, are found in different degrees in different persons, occasioned by a difference of temper, situation, circumstances, habits of thinking

thinking and acting; and being the most delicate of all our feelings, they may, on that account, be subject to greater variations; but, like every other perception of the rational mind, they are to be found in one degree or other in every individual who deserves the epithet of *rational*. The coldest, most stupid, insensible hearts, have them, not as you would wish and expect, but in some degree or other. There appears at some times, and in some tempers, a strange insensibility in the soul; as there may be a like deadness and insensibility in some parts of the body: but if even these are attended to by others, or they will themselves attend to their own sentiments on some occasions, they will not be found destitute of the moral sense. There are singular instances in which it totally disappears; as, in some dangerous cases, all symptoms of life are gone, and nothing but certain death is looked for: but even in these it may be recovered by proper treatment; and often revives unexpectedly on surprising accidents. It is not confined to good men; they have it in a way peculiar to themselves: but bad men have

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it too, and often in a degree far exceeding the goodness of their character.

C H A P. II.

A sense of merit and demerit is essential to a rational being.

A Sense of merit and demerit is nearly related to, but different at the same time from, a sense of moral excellence. A difference in the object must be attended with a difference in the perception. There are actions truly amiable and estimable, to which no reward is due; as, on the other hand, there are actions of the most odious and detestable kind, that cannot be the subject of punishment. The tender care and continual watching of a mother over her child gives high delight, and is intitled to approbation; but may not be meritorious, because she may be under the influence of a blind instinct, which she is unable to resist. The treachery, cruelty, and horrid barbarity, of a madman, is a proper object of displeasure, hatred, and detestation; but is not punishable,

nishable, because he is pushed on to such actions by an impulse which he is not able to withstand. To constitute merit or demerit, there must be choice and self-determination; and as the action must flow from a determination of the will upon a free choice, so its merit or demerit must rise or fall in exact proportion to the degree of these powers.

A parent is possessed of a great degree of natural affection, which he hath in common with the lower animals, is placed in circumstances which give no resistance or obstruction to the full exertion of this instinct; he therefore pursues the interest of his children without hesitation, without once balancing, or the possibility of doing so. He certainly does right; he has satisfaction himself in well-doing, and gives satisfaction to all who observe his good conduct. But has he merit; the merit which he or any other man may have in doing right actions to which he is not impelled by any such irresistible instinct? Doth common sense ascribe that merit to the dutiful behaviour of parents in the supposed circumstances, which is ascribed to good actions of a different kind in the

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the ordinary commerce of life? It certainly doth not. Let then the state of the case be altered, and see how it turns out. Suppose a parent, a mother for instance, surrounded with temptations to gaiety, pleasure, and pomp, of all which she hath a strong relish; allow her the advantage of instinct, but admit an impulse from these enticements, equal, or nigh to an equality, with its force; suppose a conflict, or the possibility of a conflict; and if either she does not allow a competition, or in the struggle steadily gives the preference where it ought to be given, hath she not merit? Will she not be allowed, not only by her family and friends, but by all who are endued with common sense, to have acted a worthy, a virtuous, and a meritorious part? On the other hand, suppose the same horrid actions done by the madman are committed by one who is not mad; inflamed indeed by passion, and disordered too in his affections and judgement; but disordered and inflamed by a passion which he might have prevented, moderated, or checked, in such degree, that, without his consent, or connivance at least, he would not have been

impelled to so odious an action : Is not here demerit in exact proportion to the nature of the crime, and the power of self-determination in the agent ?

Let us not look on such inquiries as idle refinements, or apprehend that precision in our ideas will carry us beyond the limits of common sense : on the contrary, the nonsense introduced into religion and morals is owing chiefly to inaccuracy of thought on these subjects. We ought to know, with all exactness possible, those truths that are the objects of simple perception ; and happy it would be for us if we made these our chief study. This subject has often undergone the torture of the schools ; but belongs to common sense. All actions, good or bad, flowing from a determination of the will upon a free choice, are objects of that perception, and pronounced upon without hesitation, on being fairly presented to the mind. Their merit and demerit are seen intuitively ; and no man is at a loss to affirm, that the action is worthy of praise or blame, reward or punishment.

If an exact distribution of rewards and punishments is made by one invested with authority,

authority, you may observe the acquiescence and entire satisfaction of the people. Perhaps they may pity the criminal; but they approve of his punishment, and say he deserved it. On the other hand, if the distribution is not exact, they complain, — of what? of injustice; that is, of the magistrate's exceeding or falling short of the standard of merit and demerit they have in their minds. People are perhaps more apt to complain of an excess of severity than of clemency; and on these occasions say, it was too much, more than necessary, or more than the criminal deserved; in which they discover their justice, as well as humanity, and the accuracy of their ideas on all these subjects. But they are offended with lenity as well as with severity, when it runs to any great excess, not only on account of its remote ill consequences, but also on account of its immediate ill effects in lessening the horror of vice. They have their bounds on both sides, which they cannot bear to be transgressed. If the ruler has the skill to temper judgement with mercy, so as vice shall be discountenanced and discouraged, with as little suffering to the offend-

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er as is possible, they are highly satisfied; but any remarkable deviation from the rules of just government raises an immediate outcry, not only from principles of humanity and just policy, but from that sense of merit and demerit which is so deeply rooted in the human mind.

These observations are so just, and occur so easily and obviously to those who have the least knowledge of human nature, that one must be astonished at the boldness and folly of modern sceptics, in attempting to destroy or weaken our natural expectation of an exact retribution from the ruler of the universe. It is natural for us to be extremely anxious about a revelation from God on so interesting a subject; and they must be strange persons who are not; but to dismiss our hopes and fears of futurity, is absolutely impossible. Common sense is an overmatch for all the reasoning in the world on this subject.

C H A P. III.

The moral sense may be in full exercise, when conscience does not act at all.

BESIDES the sense of merit and demerit we have had under consideration, there is a consciousness of both belonging to the human mind, which must not be passed over. The one is what commonly goes under the name of *the moral sense*; the other is the application of that sense to our own good or ill behaviour, and is commonly called *conscience*. The distinction is real and considerable, and deserves more attention than is usually given it. It were happy for the world, if the one were as closely connected with the other as is generally thought: but it is far otherwise; for the moral sense, and also the sense of merit and demerit, may be in full exercise, where conscience does not operate at all, or is faint and weak in its operation. Upon hearing Nathan's story concerning the ewe-lamb, David's sense of demerit was quick and strong; but without any consciousness

consciousness of guilt, till Nathan uttered these words, "Thou art the man." Upon that application to himself, and his own behaviour, he fell under the power of conscience; and then had perceptions and feelings of a different kind from what he had before. David could not be ignorant of the heinous crimes he had committed; he had probably some faint obscure perception of his guilt, and some concern about it; but not that consciousness which works repentance, and paves the way for a reconciliation with God. Therefore, to prevent his ruin, God sent his prophet to reclaim him; and the prophet executed his commission with great address. It is thought, that Nathan had recourse to a parable, from a fear that David would be offended with his speaking plain; but this conjecture does not correspond with that pious king's regard for the messengers of God. It is more probable, that the prophet wisely proposed to put his generous sentiments in full motion before letting him know his own concern in the subject, that so he might make the application to him when he was least prepared to evade or resist it; for
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mankind are naturally very quick and prompt in diverting the force of any accusation against themselves. Nathan, upon the whole, performed the office of a good conscience to David, and wrought in him that consciousness of demerit whereof we speak.

It may seem strange, that a prince of such piety, and so great discernment, as King David, should have occasion to be put in mind of those gross vices he had been guilty of. But have we not many examples of this kind in common life? To say nothing of those who are remarkably quick-sighted in spying out their neighbours faults, and blind to their own, are there not others, of better dispositions, whose moral character bears no proportion to the sublimity of their notions, and the delicacy of their sentiments? and others, again, of distinguished worth in several respects, who overlook defects and faults that are visible to every one but themselves? The truth is, the generality even of the well-disposed, are more employed in contemplating virtue and vice in the general, than in surveying their own temper and actions. The first is easy and

entertaining, the other not so; and therefore the one subject is much more studied than the other. Numbers of people have recourse to books, to the best company, and to the theatre, for improving their moral sense, and seem to rejoice in the proficiency they make, who would be much startled at a hint from conscience, concerning some things in their temper and manners; and undergo great pain in giving this monitor a patient hearing; and therefore take care to find other employment for their thoughts. Men of consummate virtue may have higher delight in conversing with themselves, than in the sublimest discourse, or the most striking representation of moral excellence; but ordinary persons meet with much darkness and confusion, many mortifications and discouragements in this exercise; and therefore betake themselves to the cultivation of the moral sense; which makes that disparity and disproportion between our general sense of merit and demerit, and the operation of conscience. The one being much in exercise, grows lively and strong; whereas the other being neglected, becomes weak and languid. Besides,
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men employ all the powers of sophistry against the testimony of conscience, as modern sceptics do against the Christian revelation. It is not in their power to disbelieve; but they will object, they will argue long; and by the help of much refinement, and various subterfuges, keep their minds in some suspense, and ward off the serious belief of unpleasant and alarming truths. That they are not so good as they ought to be, they will readily acknowledge; but that their proceedings are unfair, that they are dishonest, that their practice contradicts their professions, they will not allow to be fact, or not to be a certain fact; they are positive that no such thing can be proved against them. Thus do unhappy men strain all their powers of reasoning, to obtain a temporary respite: a short, and but an imperfect relief of little value; for after all, there remains some fear, some suspicion, some doubt about the truth of the charge; a certain consciousness of demerit, however weak, low, and obscure.

Do but consider how early mankind are taught to value themselves upon birth, rank, riches, power, magnificence; how

much they do value themselves upon these external advantages, and how incessantly keen they are in the pursuit of them, and you will not wonder that they have so little consciousness of merit and demerit; you will rather wonder that they have any at all: and yet, amidst all this hurry and confusion, the testimony of conscience is regarded. A good man hath, at the bottom of his heart, a consciousness of integrity, yielding him a continual refreshment: and a bad man cannot get rid of a suspicion, at least, that all is not with him as it ought to be, and as he could wish it should be.

Should a period arrive, wherein this hurry being over, these false opinions confuted, and false maxims exploded, and men left at full liberty to view themselves in a proper light, then truth and justice will prevail: the good man will lift up his head with joy; the knave, and the half honest, will be covered with shame and confusion, and pierced through with inexpressible anguish. This the gospel-revelation hath declared; and there is not the shadow of reason to doubt it: nay, there is all the reason in the world to expect it;
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for nature seems plainly to point at this. But it is not our present business to pursue this subject further. Let it suffice, that, without the help of learning or laboured proof, it manifestly appears, that a sense of moral excellence, a sense of merit and demerit, with a consciousness of the one and the other in some degree, belongs to the rational mind; and that we cannot disclaim these sensations, without renouncing the characteristic of our rational nature.

C H A P. IV.

To bear witness to our fulfilment or non-fulfilment of known obligation, is the province of conscience.

CONSCIENCE, as the word is commonly used, is extremely ambiguous. It is put for every judgement, true or false, doubtful or certain, which men form upon their good or ill behaviour. Hence the notion of an erroneous, misinformed, and misguided conscience. It is confounded with the law or rule of duty by which we

we judge, and supposed to have authority in itself to forbid or command, often independent of, and sometimes in contradiction to, the law of God. Hence the notion of a weak, a scrupulous, and, what with great propriety may be called, an evil conscience. But conscience, in its true and proper signification, is nothing else than a clear decision upon our conformity or disconformity to the rule of our duty in well-known cases; like what Nathan pronounced in these words, "Thou art the man;" telling a knave, that he is a knave; and an honest man, that he is an honest man; and a pretender to integrity, that he is not what he would be thought; that his character is doubtful, suspicious, imperfect: — An easy and obvious judgement; which, however, through timidity and superstition on the one hand, and through boldness and dissingenuity on the other, few reach in all its extent, but which scarce any can altogether avoid.

The Apostle Paul gives a very clear and intelligible account of this whole matter. Speaking of the Gentiles, who had no written law, he says, "They were a law to themselves,"

“themselves,” in as much as the commands of God appeared to be engraven upon their hearts ; and adds, “their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts accusing or excusing them,” as they did good or evil. He does not confound conscience with the law, or assign it any other office, than that of bearing witness to mens conformity or disconformity to the law of God. He does not apply the testimony of conscience to disputed points, the knowledge of which may depend on the criticism of words, or logical reasoning ; but to cases of right and wrong of the greatest notoriety, such as were manifest to all, and not hid from the Gentiles themselves. In other places, this Apostle assumes the language of the vulgar, and speaks of a weak, misguided, and defiled conscience, giving rules for mens behaviour in such cases as fall in with prudence, common sense, and common honesty ; but here his account of the natural sentiments of the human mind is strictly just and philosophical. He takes notice of what is extremely natural and unavoidable ; mens thoughts accusing or excusing them, as the testimony of conscience

science is in their favour or against them. Perhaps there are who have little experience of what the Apostle mentions; for in some instances, as has been observed, there are strange perversions of the human heart: but all must allow, that his account of things agrees with all the ideas we can form of a rational mind; nor will it be difficult to account for such exceptions as too often occur in common life.

It is common with men to talk in a high strain of conscience. Some call it the voice of God; others call it God's vicegerent; and all ascribe a sacred authority to it, except those who, affecting to speak more philosophically, affirm, that it is nothing other than the faculty of reason put into full exercise in the common course of Providence. These differences are rather nominal than real, and unworthy the notice of a true philosopher. Whether a discovery is made by God immediately, or through the intervention of a vicegerent, whether in the stated course of things, or otherwise, is of no consequence, provided the discovery is made. The vulgar make a great distinction betwixt the regular course of the planets and
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an eclipse of the sun; but a philosopher sees the hand of God equally in both. If I am favoured with a discovery of consequence to my salvation, which I did not search for, and which, if I had, I could not have reached by my own industry, I am bound to receive it as a revelation from heaven, and to acquiesce in it, and thank God for it, in the same manner as David did, upon Nathan's being commissioned to give him a discovery of himself, which he could not otherwise have reached: for our knowledge or conjecture about the course in which these discoveries come, ought no more to hinder our ascribing them to God, than our knowledge of geometry, or hydrostatics, ought to hinder us from ascribing the various events of Providence to the supreme ruler, if indeed we believe there is a God who governs the world.

C H A P. V.

The sentence of conscience is always according to truth, and therefore must stand.

IN speaking of conscience, the learned seem to be under an embarrassment that is a reproach to themselves, and hurtful to religion. They ascribe a sacred authority to it, and yet insist on laying this authority under limitations. They call conscience an oracle, and yet alledge, that it gives false responses; and though they require men to pay a sacred regard to its decisions, as coming from the vicegerent of God, they require them at the same time to try these decisions by some other standard. Is it possible to get clear of these contradictions? — Yes, it is easy, if we will take the trouble to form a true judgement of conscience; for the embarrassment flows merely from false or confused ideas concerning it.

Conscience is not a lawgiver, but a judge: and its province is not to prescribe rules of duty, but to bear witness to our fulfilling,

fulfilling, or not fulfilling, the obligations we find ourselves under; and to acquit or condemn us accordingly. Conscience will not inform you, whether you ought, or ought not, to keep a day holy to the Lord; but if you are otherwise informed, that you ought, conscience will approve of your acting up to your duty. Conscience will not tell you, that you ought not to eat this or the other kind of meats; but if you believe that you ought not, conscience will condemn you for eating. It is your part to get the best information you can of what God commands, and forbids, in this and the other case; but it is the province of conscience to pronounce upon your fidelity in avoiding what God hath forbidden, and in doing what he hath commanded; and in this the verdict of conscience cannot be erroneous, and will therefore be ratified by him in whose name it acts. It is vain to excuse yourself for not doing what God hath commanded, under a pretence that perhaps he may not have commanded it; for if you believe that the duty is commanded, your conscience will tell you, that you are bound to obey: and it is vain to excuse

yourself for doing what you believe or suspect God hath forbidden; for your conscience will tell you, that you commit sin in doing what you believe or suspect to be wrong, whether it is so or not. It is vain to plead ignorance or uncertainty about what you ought to do or forbear; for conscience will tell you, that you ought to act with fidelity according to the light you have, and will approve or censure you, as you do or do not. In short, it is vain to use artifices with conscience; for conscience is judge of uprightness of intention, and its sentence is final. It does not enter into those reasons and relations whence obligation in this and the other case may arise; but into mens intentions, concerning which it cannot be mistaken, and concerning which its verdict will be approved of God. It is incumbent on us, as hath been said, to give ourselves the clearest and fullest information we can concerning sin and duty; but we have no occasion to give information to our conscience; for as the uprightness of our proceeding is the only subject of its judgement, it pronounces on this with great fidelity,

fidelity, and truth, without our assistance.

Thou shalt not kill; — Thou shalt not steal; — Thou shalt not commit adultery; — Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve; — and, Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, — to the fulfilment of these, and many such plain duties, we are under the same obligation that the Jews were to the fulfilment of those precepts which they heard pronounced from Mount Sinai, and read on those tables that were written by the finger of God; and to the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of these duties, conscience bears the same testimony now which it will bear at the tribunal of God. There are other duties also, deducible from these and such like primary truths, that are not so obvious; but whenever they appear to be duties, conscience in like manner bears witness to our fulfilling or not fulfilling them. And conscience bears witness, not only to our fulfilment of duties that are known, but also to our fairness in the inquiries we make concerning duties of which we are not fully ascertained. If we pretend

pretend ignorance of duties that are obvious, or muster up objections to darken the evidence, or use any art to make that side to which we incline preponderate, it is the province of conscience to detect and condemn the deceit; and it is our duty to submit to its verdict: and if we do so, we shall learn that candour in judging which is of more value in life, and of a higher price in the sight of God, than all knowledge; and if we do not, we forfeit the character of integrity, and are in the utmost danger of being abandoned to our own devices. If, upon acknowledging any obligation, we forthwith set about the fulfilment, our conscience will applaud and also encourage us; but if we make unnecessary delay, or frame excuses, with a view to evade or lessen the obligation, conscience will pronounce that sentence which is due, and which will be ratified by God; for conscience is indeed the vicergerent of God.

The sceptic does not believe, that the checks which are given to his wanton fallies come from God, or that the plain intimations he has from his own mind, concerning his deceitful dealing with the evidences

dences of religion, are the voice of God: for tho' he allows that God governs the world, he has no notion of any such intercourse with the human heart, and considers all these things as the dreams of crazy minds. The wicked believer (and many such there are) does not suspect, that his shutting up the bowels of his compassion from his brother, or even his defrauding his neighbour of his right, renders him incapable of the favour of God. Though he has at times such plain intimations about it as leave no room for doubt, yet he does not consider it as the mind of God. He is willing to subscribe to the Apostle's creed, to the ten commandments, and to many other truths that have far less evidence; yet to this unpleasant truth, That he is out of favour with God, he will not subscribe; and though he does not resolve it into superstition or whim, he will not, however, submit to it as to a sentence from God: and yet if God was to speak with an audible voice from heaven, bad men, and all who live in the neglect or violation of essential duties, would hear that very sentence which is pronounced by their consciences,

sciences, and no other; for conscience is the voice of God.

C H A P. VI.

It is impossible to decline the authority, or escape the tribunal, of conscience.

AFTER all that we hear of conscience, there is ground to suspect its existence is merely ideal with the bulk of mankind. All are capable of describing it, and of assigning its proper office; and all allow it a sacred authority: but where do we find a proof of its existence? Do not we see multitudes, and those too of reputable character, living in the neglect of plain duties, and in the commission of plain faults, without any such challenges from conscience, or intimations of blame, as we suppose? are there not numbers who acknowledge their obligations to God without fulfilling them, and without the least disturbance for not fulfilling them? are there not pretenders to character, who live in the plain violation of some of the essential obligations of morality? and are there

there not multitudes, neither impious nor immoral, who employ their time and talents in a way for which they could not account to God or themselves, and yet sleep as soundly, and appear as gay and undisturbed on all occasions, as if they had acted the laudable and rational part? We say, that conscience must condemn them, and their thoughts must every now and then turn against them: but what authority have we for saying so? What proof can we give of this operation which we ascribe to conscience? It is easy to adduce a proof of the moral sense, even in persons of indifferent character, even in bad men; but what proof can we give of this awful divine authority we ascribe to conscience, and of those pungent penetrating remonstrances which are supposed to attend mens being guilty to themselves? Upon a sudden disaster, in sickness, and on a near view of death, you will say, that conscience speaks out. It is true, it does sometimes; but do not we see numbers the same persons in adversity as in prosperity, and as stupid and insensible in sickness as in health? and how common is it to see men go to death with

no concern at all, that we know of, or with no such concern as corresponds to the wickedness or vanity of their lives? What shall we say to these things? It is hard to charge mankind in all ages with a mistake on so interesting and important a subject; and yet it is hard to find phenomena in nature to justify their opinion. It is difficult to account for their ascribing such power to conscience as they have uniformly done, without some reason for so doing; and yet an accurate inquirer will not admit an opinion on general report, without some evidence.

There must be some capital error, or some considerable inaccuracy, in mens judgement of this subject: for undoubtedly every man who has a rational soul has a conscience; though every man's conscience does not act the part which we assign it. It is probable, that the consciences of most men do not act at all, or not with any vigour; not certainly with force sufficient to produce a change in their temper and manners; and probably not with force sufficient to be attended to by themselves. The being of conscience is, after all, apparent, not only from its exerting

exerting its force on some emergencies, but from its being liable, if it is properly touched, to be put in action at any time. If a few exceptions are made, you shall not find the man who will not blush, be out of countenance, or somehow discover some disturbance and embarrassment upon touching some essential neglect or violation of his duty, to God, his neighbour, or himself. If you enter into reasoning with him upon this subject, he will reason with you, and get courage as he proceeds in the argumentation, however frivolous and unjust his arguments may be. If you ruffle his passions, he will defend himself with spirit, and repel the charge with indignation and contempt. But if you have the skill to touch the fore part with propriety, he will feel; and in proportion to the uprightness of his disposition, will yield to your remonstrances, or rather to the authority of his own conscience. Were bad men, and they who are in a bad way, addressed with the skill with which Nathan addressed David, we should have many proofs, if not of that candour and submission wherewith this prince acknowledged his fault, yet of the

real existence and sovereign authority of conscience.

Conscience is not a fiction, but a reality of the last consequence, as it is the power by which Almighty God executes his moral government; and which, however it may lie dormant for a time, will be put into full exertion, either for the conversion of sinners in this life, or their punishment in the next. The following facts concerning the operation of conscience may be appealed to every one's observation and experience, and will deserve our serious attention.

1. If we chuse to reckon conscience amongst the powers of the human mind, we must however allow, that it is not under our direction and controul, as all our other powers are. We can employ our understanding, our memory, and judgement, on what subjects we chuse, and put any power or faculty of body or mind into exercise, and continue or stop its exercise, as we incline; but we have not such command over conscience. We can look over the actions of our lives, and approve or condemn as we see cause, though in that we are not very expert, because we
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are not much exercised; but that clear view and pungent sense of things which we ascribe to conscience, we cannot give ourselves at pleasure. What would a good man give to have those discoveries and feelings of the right and wrong of his temper and actions at all times, which he has on some occasions! and what would a bad man give to get clear of certain views of himself, and challenges of conscience, with which he is sometimes disturbed! The case of bad men is notorious, who, as Archbishop Tillotson observes, may say to their consciences as Ahab to Elijah, "Hast thou found me, O my enemy?" and as the devils to our Saviour, "Art thou come to torment us before the time?"

If a man could put his conscience into full exercise, he might almost have it in his power to convert himself: I do not say altogether, because the operation of conscience may be evaded or resisted; but almost, because it is extremely difficult to withstand the power of conscience when it is in full exertion.

2. Though there are proper means to be employed for obtaining the exercise of conscience;

conscience; yet the blessing comes from God, and from him alone. If the husbandman will turn up the soil, and break the clod, and throw in the seed in proper season, he may expect a crop: but not with absolute certainty; because God may bless or blast his labours, and give him a scanty or plentiful harvest as he sees fit. It is just so with regard to the operation of conscience. If we are assiduous in reading God's word, and hearing it preached, and compare our temper and actions with the standard of our duty, and state our case fairly to God in secret devotion, we shall undoubtedly obtain the operation of conscience; but not at all times, and in the same measure we wish and expect; because the operation of conscience is not necessarily connected with the practice of these duties, but with the good pleasure of God; and because he may see fit to exercise our faith and patience; and, finally, because it appears to be a fundamental maxim of the divine government, to give or withhold further discoveries according to the good or bad use we make of those we are favoured with.

3. We are favoured with the operation
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of conscience in proportion to our disposition to comply with its dictates. Whether we call conscience the voice of God, or the vicegerent of God, or in whatever manner we conceive of it, this we know, that it treats mankind as a prudent kind friend does those whom he wishes to reform. If we are in a disposition to quibble, to prevaricate, to evade the truth, or to trample on its authority, conscience withdraws its admonitions, or hints them modestly, as one may say; and if we are obstinately bent on gratifying our inclinations at all hazards, it forbears its remonstrances: but as soon as we are in a disposition to listen, it acquaints us with the truth; and if we are willing to give it full admission, the truth enters the mind in the same manner as light enters the eye, and we see our situation as a benighted traveller sees every object in its true light on the rising of the sun.

To the unwilling mind, these discoveries are mortifying and painful; for nothing can be more so, than for a man to find himself in a bad state which he is not willing to give up: but, on the other hand, conscience opens the most pleasant, encouraging,

encouraging, exhilarating, prospects to the mind that is willing to pursue its directions; and these prospects enlarge and improve by every step as he advances in his progress. To this, none but the good, or those who have made some proficiency in goodness, can bear full testimony: but all who have had the least experience of following the direction of conscience, must know, that in proportion as we correct one fault, another appears; and that in proportion as we get the better of our evil dispositions, the good prevail with an increase of joy and light; and that, as in ascending a rising ground, our horizon enlarges, so our views, our prospects, and our satisfaction, enlarge and improve in proportion to our progress, till we reach the perfection of virtue and happiness for which we were originally designed. So that conscience appears to be that power by which the moral government is executed, to the joy and satisfaction of the good, as well as to the consternation of the disobedient subject.

4. All attempts to escape from the power of conscience, are foolish and vain. To deny or dissemble a perception and feeling
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of moral excellence, of merit and demerit, is a bare-faced folly, not much inferior to that of arguing against the faculties of seeing with our eyes, and feeling with our hands: and to deny, or doubt, of the being of conscience, is as vain as to deny or doubt of the reality of a moral sense. We can, it is true, make a shift to avoid the sight of our faults and defects, as we can turn away our eyes from disagreeable objects; but as soon as the object is brought full into view, we must necessarily submit to the pain we have so industriously avoided.

We see multitudes go on in the neglect of known duties, and in the practice of known vice, without any apprehension of danger, and, to appearance, without any symptom of remorse; but from hence are not to conclude, that they are utter strangers to the challenges of conscience. Many of them wish they were better men than they are; some resolve, or half resolve, to alter their course; not one at the bottom of his mind is satisfied with himself; not one of them can take a true and steady view of his state; all have a dark, obscure, confused notion, that mat-

ters are not with them as they ought to be; with a secret dread that they may not end as they wish them to do. This we know for certain, that bad men cannot bear your touching the sore part; that they do not love to come near the subject, and keep at as great a distance from it as they can: and from hence you may conclude, that they are self-condemned; and consider them in the same light with criminals who are not yet convicted, but find themselves liable to condemnation, and dread a trial, with this poor resource, that *possibly* there may be no trial. What part these men ought to act, is obvious; but what part they will act, is uncertain.

The very reason why men fly from conscience, might, one would think, be an inducement to submit to its challenges. They are never at perfect ease; they always dread it; they know they cannot avoid it; and they know, too, that the longer it is a coming, it falls the heavier; but through downright pusillanimity, they chuse a short respite, at the hazard of terrible suffering; and few of the species have the spirit to act any other part. The part they act is no less foolish than mean;

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but they sit down contented, under the imputation of folly and meanness, rather than bear a present pain. And this part they act so frequently in the concerns of common life, that we are not to wonder at their doing so in religion and morality. The condition of mankind is truly pitiable; and, properly represented, could not fail to move the compassion of the Father of mercies; but what renders their condition equally desperate as deplorable, is this, — The generality of mankind will not take even this trouble, but go on enjoying the present, at the manifest hazard of all they dread in futurity.

This is indeed a hideous picture of human life: but it is just, and merits the attention of every one; for every individual is more or less concerned in the charge: and it is at the same time the only account that is to be made of the evils to which we are subjected, of what we feel in this life, and fear in the next.

B O O K VIII.

Of a Future Judgement.

C H A P. I.

To maintain a curious debate about a future judgement, when we ought to be employed in preparing for so awful an event, is unpardonable folly.

LORD Bolingbroke, who contends so zealously for the being and providence of God, is no less zealous in decrying our natural notions of his moral perfections and moral government, together with the expectation we have of an exact retribution of our good and evil actions. But never was a great genius more absurdly, or indeed more idly employed. For in spite of all the arts of logic, of rhetoric, of bullying, and of canting, practised by his Lordship, every one who believes there is a God, will believe, that he loves the right, and hates the wrong; and expect of course, that he will

will reward the one, and punish the other. It is extremely remarkable, that, in contradiction to their religious system, they who believed in gods of an immoral character, were all of this mind. Such is the power of Common Sense on this subject.

There is a difference betwixt the insensibility which the scripture describes, by having the conscience seared as with a hot iron, and a total extinction of the moral sense. Passions, prejudices, wrong habits of thinking, and, above all, wrong habits of acting, may produce the one; but nothing less than the extinction of rationality can effect the other. Men practised in fraud and extortion, do often come into the presence of God without fear; or if they have any dark surmises of the displeasure of God on account of these vices, they hope, however, to be forgiven, in consideration of their good behaviour in other respects. A debauchee, in like manner, will talk confidently of his hope in God, on account of some good qualities he knows himself possessed of, without seeming to be disturbed at those vices of which he cannot be ignorant. Examples of this kind are every day seen, and easy
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to be accounted for; but a sense of the difference betwixt right and wrong, merit and demerit, still remains. The debauchee is shocked at the vices of the knave, and the knave at those of the debauchee; they mutually condemn, and denounce the judgements of God, each against the other; though, blinded, as they are, by their passions, they cannot easily perceive their own danger. When their passions subside, and reason clears up, and their judging powers have obtained full and free exercise, they then begin to fear for themselves. The moment that a knave discovers himself to be a knave, he loses his confidence in God; and the moment a debauchee sees his vices in their true light, he condemns himself, and trembles at the thought of condemnation from God. Nor is it possible it should be otherwise: for though we may sometimes be so blinded by self-love, as to think favourably of the vices to which we are addicted, and even to flatter ourselves, that God thinks of them in the same manner, we have not however lost all sense of the distinction betwixt good and evil; nor can

we persuade ourselves that vice and virtue are equally acceptable to God.

Christian divines and philosophers are charged with founding too much on abstract ideas, to the neglect of, and sometimes in contradiction to, the simple perceptions of the rational mind; but their antagonists, who reproach them with this folly, have outdone them far, by absurd and vain attempts to reason mankind out of an expectation of happiness or misery suited to their good or ill behaviour, that is essential to rationality. In vain would you persuade a good man to give up sentiments so consonant to all the ideas he hath of God, and which also are the chief joy and support of his life; and bad men, on the other hand, however willing, cannot get rid of the fear of a punishment which they know they deserve. What Lord Bolingbroke might have intended by so vain a profusion of learning, we will not pretend to determine: but if, as would appear, he aims at no less than setting men above the hopes and fears of futurity, we will be bold to say, that he is no philosopher; for he has not the knowledge of human nature which belongs to
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that character. A libertine, who would make himself easy in his vices, will do more by one atrocious act of villany, or by a continued course of debauchery and lewdness, than by all the subtle reasoning contained in the five volumes of Lord Bolingbroke's philosophical works; and the one without the other will be of little avail. It is pity, after all, that such abilities should have been so perverted, and that one who could have shone with so great lustre on the side of virtue, should have demeaned himself thus.

Had this Noble Lord contented himself with checking the boldness of the learned, in their reasonings about the divine nature and perfections, we should have listened with pleasure to those pious exclamations wherewith he hath thought fit to embellish his works. And if, with the ability he discovers in overthrowing scholastic opinions, he had settled the truth on its proper basis, he would have acquired lasting renown to himself, and done notable service to mankind. But by demanding so peremptorily, and in so high and magisterial a tone, that we dismiss all ideas of the moral perfections and moral government

ment of God, with our natural hopes and fears of retribution in a future state, he hath assumed an authority to which men of sense will not submit. He does not, nor can he, refuse, that God hath a full right, with power sufficient, to dispense rewards and punishments to us and all his other subjects, in another life, as well as in the present. He only alledges, that being incapable of comprehending his plan, and penetrating into the chief end and object of his government, we cannot, without a revelation, positively affirm, that he will do so. Now, should this be allowed him, we are obliged, nevertheless, to consider ourselves as accountable to God for all our actions; and to conduct ourselves with a just regard to his favour and displeasure, not only in the present, but in all future periods of existence; nor can we do otherwise, without the imputation of egregious folly.

To enter into curious disquisitions concerning what is possible and impossible in nature, what is the chief object and end of the divine government, is too presumptuous for short-sighted mortals, and foreign to this Appeal. But to bring his

Lordship's bold assertions to the standard of common sense, is our business; and no distinction of rank or genius shall restrain us from using that freedom with one who hath treated all the learned with such indignity, and so grossly insulted the common sense of mankind.

He had no occasion to put us in mind, that many excellencies in our nature have no place in the divine, or to give himself the trouble of proving, that the divine perfections differ from ours as finite from infinite, and limited from absolute: for to this all agree. Our wisdom, our power, our goodness, and all our other perfections, cannot enter into comparison with his. All our ideas of him are inadequate. What then? Must we therefore not think of him at all? Yes; his Lordship allows us to think of his being, wisdom, power, and goodness. But why of these perfections? for are they not as different from ours, and as far beyond our comprehension, as his mercy and justice? But we have not, says he, the same evidence for his justice that we have for his other perfections. Are we then at liberty to doubt his being just? Dare we say, that right
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and wrong, just and unjust, are in the same estimation with him? that he hath the same regard for a knave, an oppressor, a debauchee, that he hath for the pious, the benevolent, or the just? Or shall we, from an affected modesty, alledge, that, for aught we know to the contrary, good and bad men will meet with the same treatment from him? or with no other distinction than is made in the present life, where there is often one event to the righteous and the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not; to him that sweareth, and to him that feareth an oath? Is this common sense?

Lord Bolingbroke has stated with accuracy the difference between proof, probability, and conjecture; and, like a skilful disputant, insists, that all reasoning from the phenomena of nature, in favour of a future retribution, falls short of proof, and even of probability. But his Lordship has overlooked a truth of great importance, which stands in no need of being supported by proof, probability, or conjecture, and a truth of such conse-

quence as ought never to be forgotten, and, when duly attended to, supercedes all reasoning on this subject. The truth is, that all mankind are accountable to him who gave and upholds their being, and bound to hold themselves at all times in readiness to render him an account of all their actions. How this obvious, important, interesting truth, escaped his Lordship, and how it comes to be so little regarded by the friends and adversaries of religion, is not easily accounted for.

The master of a family hath disappeared, is gone to a far country, his return becomes uncertain; some say he will, and others that he will not return: Are his servants at liberty to neglect his business? Are they not bound to go on in the management of his affairs with such diligence and fidelity, as may enable them to account to him upon his return? Does not common prudence, common sense, as well as common honesty, require them to do so? They have nothing to do with idle reasonings about what may or may not happen; and all inclination to listen to reasoning of this sort, betrays weakness of

of understanding, or dishonesty of heart, or both. Let their master's return be ever so uncertain, there can be no uncertainty about the part they have to act; nor can they, in consistency with common sense, or common honesty, dispense with their acting this part, till there appears some proof, probability, or well-founded conjecture at least, that their master will not return. The application is obvious: We are bound to conduct ourselves towards our master in heaven by the same rules of common sense, and common honesty, by which we conduct ourselves towards our masters on earth; and if we do not, we deserve to be punished for our infidelity and imprudence.

Lord Bolingbroke talks of the lofty madness of Plato, and the pompous jargon of Aristotle, and treats all the learned from Plato to Dr Clarke as visionaries, on account of their refinements in reasoning for a future retribution, while he himself is guilty of more unpardonable extravagance. They have, unadvisedly perhaps, endeavoured to confirm the natural dictates of the rational mind by the subtilties of logic; but he, with equal zeal, and
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more inconsiderate temerity, labours to cancel these sentiments by reasoning equally subtle. All his arguments, allowing them their full force, affect only the hypotheses of the learned, and give no satisfaction to a man of sense. He believes he has defeated and completely routed the divines and philosophers; and glories in it not a little: but, like many other overconfident combatants, has pursued his victory too far, and stands exposed to the ridicule of men of sense; who will tell him, that whatever uncertainty may be in the reasonings of philosophers on these profound subjects, our being accountable to God is an undoubted fact of the greatest weight and force; and that if he cannot offer some proof, probability, or conjecture at least, that we shall not actually be called to account, we are just where we were, without receiving the least relief from all his Lordship's labours. In reality, this awful truth, that we are accountable for our whole behaviour to one who can make us happy or miserable for ever, hath more weight and force than all the arguments of the learned, and ought to have prevented all controversy upon this subject.

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Lord Bolingbroke takes advantage of Mr Locke's assertion, concerning the possibility of matter being endued with thought and reflection. But this is a poor resource. For what signify the conjectures of philosophers about the essence of the soul? It were to be wished, that great men were more cautious of perplexing the world with incomprehensible notions; though, when their minds are inflamed in the search of truth, they cannot always observe the circumspection that is requisite. But we say again, what signify the opinions of the learned about the essence of the soul? For whatever it be, the same power which upholds it in being now, can continue its existence for ever. Curious people may puzzle themselves with questions concerning material and immaterial essences; but a wise man will repose himself with confidence on that power which supports the whole system; as, on the other hand, a bad man will dread condign punishment from the same almighty hand.

If any regard is due to curious reasoning, we ought to listen, with high admiration and delight, to the prince of philosophers,

sophers, maintaining, upon the very verge of death, the immortality of the soul, with the happiness of good men in another life; but in that variety of arguments advanced by this great and good man, none give such satisfaction to a plain understanding, as his observation to Crito, that the carcase he showed so great concern about was not Socrates; that Socrates was he who then discoursed, reasoned, and gave arrangement to his thoughts; and who, he said, would soon give him the slip. This is common sense.

No man thinks that his head, or his limbs, or his whole body together, is himself. Every one is conscious of another and nobler self; and of an identity, which a parcel of matter, that shifts and varies its form and dimensions perpetually, is incapable of: and every one who believes this, ought, without puzzling himself about the essence of the soul, to rest assured, that the same almighty power which, beyond our comprehension, hath preserved our identity, under a perpetual flux and reflux of atoms, of thoughts, affections, and imaginations, in all the preceding periods of our existence, can keep

keep us the same identical persons in every future period, and assign us a lot, suited, with all possible exactness, to our character and conduct.

Lord Bolingbroke alledges, that Christian divines have charged the divine administration with injustice in the present life, in order to establish the necessity of a just retribution in the next. His Lordship's allegation is unjust, and highly injurious. He ought to have known, that the great divine and philosopher with whom he concludes his list of visionaries, and whom he affects to treat with an air of contempt, has on several occasions, and particularly in two excellent sermons on the subject, shewn, that a moral government is already begun, and going forward, in the present life, and about to receive its full accomplishment in the next.

Christian divines neglect not to point out to mankind the different treatment they may expect in consequence of their different behaviour, in the present life, as well as the future. They call upon the wicked to observe, that, notwithstanding the long-suffering patience exercised towards them, and many undeserved fa-

vours conferred upon them, they are generally crossed, disappointed, and baffled, in all their designs of founding happiness upon iniquity, or on external advantages though innocently acquired. They, on the other hand, take notice to the just, how frequently they are countenanced, supported, and favoured, in proportion to the integrity of their actions; and often beyond their hope and expectation. They carefully point out the many evils, national, domestic, and personal, which commonly attend impiety and wickedness; with the blessings of various kinds conferred by providence, as the reward of a conscientious behaviour; and mark, with exactness, the strict connection in the natural course of things, betwixt every deviation from the right, and sufferings of various kinds, in our bodies, in our minds, in our interest, and in our reputation. They shew, upon the whole, that the phenomena of nature bear full testimony to the moral character of its author; and that as great a regard is had to merit and demerit in the present course of things, as consists with a state of probation, and the relations and connections at present subsisting

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ing between the just and the unjust. They do not indeed agree with Lord Bolingbroke in affirming, that this is all the retribution we ought to expect. On the contrary, they consider it as a sure preface of a more perfect execution of justice in a future state. Whether his Lordship's opinion, or theirs, is most agreeable to common sense, is submitted to the judgement of the public.

C H A P. II.

The same subject continued.

MR Hume agrees with Lord Bolingbroke, in censuring the liberty taken by divines and philosophers in their reasonings about the nature and perfections of God. In the person of an Epicurean, he affirms, that the Deity is a singular being in nature, without a genus, to which the manner of his existence may be reduced; and therefore, that no comparison ought to be instituted betwixt him and other beings, and no inference can be justly drawn from the powers and qua-

lities of other beings, to those perfections we ascribe to him: and further alledges, that we cannot fairly infer one perfection from another, nor a new display of the same perfection from a former. He adds, that every exertion of any principle of action is a satisfaction, as he terms it, of that principle; so that no room is left for the expectation of a further exertion. These things are curious, and have the air of strict philosophy, and withal a threatening aspect to the whole of religion; but let us try them by the standard of common sense.

The Deity is, no doubt, a singular being in nature; on this account, that all other beings, deriving their existence from him, must be subjected to such limitations as he sees fit; whereas he cannot be limited by any other being; and must therefore exist in a manner totally different from them. No comparison can be made betwixt other beings and him; nor is it safe to reason from the manner of existence, the powers, or perfections, of subordinate beings, to that of the supreme. Nevertheless we cannot plead ignorance of his perfections; nor can we, on this account,

count, excuse our neglecting to acquaint ourselves with him; because we have a more certain way of coming at the knowledge of his perfections, than by any such reasonings, or by any reasoning whatever.

His wisdom, power, goodness, and even his justice, are manifestly displayed in the œconomy of nature, are as much the objects of simple perception, and, to an attentive observer, are as clearly seen by the eye of reason, as external forms are seen by the bodily eye. We have not as yet a full display of the justice of God, nor can we have it till the time of retribution; but we have sufficient ground to expect this event; nor can we avoid this awful expectation in any consistency with common sense. We agree, therefore, with Mr Hume, and all other free-thinkers, in dismissing all reasoning upon this subject; but require, what they cannot justly refuse, their regulating their actions by such plain notices as they have of the divine nature and perfections.

Pretenders to freedom of thought have been long accustomed to plead their ignorance of certain truths they know not, in excuse of their not paying due attention
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to what they know. This artifice was first practised against some articles of the Christian revelation, and is now employed against the being and perfections of God; but is too gross to impose on men of true judgement: for the argument is of equal force when applied to the works of nature as when applied to the author of nature; because we are as little able to comprehend the one as to comprehend the other, and our ideas of the one are as inadequate as our ideas of the other. We may have adequate ideas of the works of art, because our faculties are commensurate to them; but there is not one subject in nature which we fully comprehend, or of which we can attain adequate ideas. No man who is a philosopher, needs be told, that we know nothing of any subject beyond a few qualities which present themselves to our view; and these we know no further than our narrow views can reach. All beyond this is to us a mystery; and as much so, as the nature and perfections of God, or the most profound doctrines of the Christian faith. Yet none but fools will give up the knowledge of any subject in nature, because they cannot comprehend

comprehend the whole. And why should men act more foolishly in religion than in any other concern? Prudence requires, that on all subjects we be cautious of reasoning from principles we do not well understand; and on that account we allow free-thinkers the benefit of their argument against the laboured reasoning of divines and philosophers, on subjects which exceed their comprehension; but cannot dispense with their giving the attention which is due to such plain notices as they have from nature, of the being and perfections of God.

We have already declared against all attempts of explicating the inexplicable plan of providence, and against rashly accounting for appearances, and answering objections, on this incomprehensible subject, as may be done on subjects which we thoroughly understand; but we cannot, without giving up the power of perception, by which we are distinguished from brutes and idiots, disavow our knowledge of that depth of design, and exquisite contrivance, which runs through the whole. It is our privilege, and it is our duty, as rational beings, to trace the power and wisdom

wisdom of God as far as our faculties will carry us; and where they stop, it well becomes us to confess our ignorance, and silently admire, and reverently adore, what we cannot comprehend. We are far from approving of those vague, indiscriminate, indeterminate ideas of goodness in God, which many have derived from the weak indulgence of parents to their children, and of princes to their favourites; because they are injurious to his majesty. But, on the other hand, we shall be highly ungrateful to him, and injurious to ourselves, if we are not duly sensible of the fatherly affection, and kind care, the forbearance, and forgiveness, which shine forth so illustriously in the œconomy of providence; and which we ourselves have so largely experienced. We do not pretend to demonstrate, from any thing we know of the present state, that there will be a future state of existence: but this we know, that no man can, with any colour of reason, affirm, that there will not. We forbear to argue, from the ideas we have of a perfect administration, that there will be a more exact distribution of rewards and punishments than prevails at present; but

but we naturally expect it; and to say that we do not, is to belie the genuine sentiments of the human heart. The joy, the peace, the satisfaction, with manifold conveniencies, which, in the natural course of things, attend the practice of well-doing, are sufficient to encourage our hopes: as, on the other hand, the exquisite sufferings in body and mind which follow upon the practice of vice and folly, are sufficient to keep alive our fears of what may take place in the other state; and common sense, though we had no revelation, would direct us to regulate our conduct with a just regard to an event so important and interesting.

As to what Mr Hume affirms, of the exertion of a principle of action giving satisfaction to that principle, we allow it does to a certain degree; but that it gives such satisfaction to the principle, or to the agent, as to leave no room for the expectation of a new exertion, we cannot allow; because the contrary appears to common observation. When Mr Hume hath emitted a proposition in philosophy that would occur to none but himself, he exerts, and, according to his own man-

ner of speaking, hath given satisfaction to a principle of action, by which nature hath distinguished him; but one would be rash to affirm, that, in so doing, he hath given such complete satisfaction to that principle, as never to emit another of the kind; for in reading a few pages further, you are surpris'd and entertained with another, and after that another; nor can you fix, with any certainty, when this principle of action will be fully satisfied.

We commonly consider one exertion of a principle of action as an earnest of another; and repeated exertions of the same principle, as a sufficient ground (where no reason appears to the contrary) of expecting a continuance of the same or like exertion in the same or like circumstances. By this rule, we proceed in all the discoveries we make from observation and experiment. It is thus we expect that bread will nourish, and poison destroy our bodies; that some kinds of food are wholesome, and others are not. It is thus we expect mischief from some animals, and good offices from others. With regard to our own species, we expect, that a good man will do good, and a malicious
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man will do evil, and an honest man will do honest actions. We may indeed be deceived in our judgement of men, of animals, and of all beings subjected to changes, that flow from causes we do not know; yet we still proceed, and, if we are not fools, we will proceed, to regulate our expectations by what we know, without perplexing ourselves with possibilities that are beyond the reach of our knowledge: With how much greater certainty, then, ought we to regulate ourselves, by expectations founded on the discovery of perfections in God, that are subject to no change or variation? If from the experience we have had of former acts of friendship and generosity from a good man, we naturally expect a return of the same generosity and friendship, in the same circumstances, or upon the like occasion; and if, from the chastisement an insolent person meets with from a man of spirit, he naturally dreads, and has all reason to expect, a like chastisement upon a like insult; how much more ought we to proceed with a just regard to the well-known perfections of him who is subject to no limitation or change? These

are the rules by which we conduct ourselves in the common concerns of life; and to go by other rules, or not to proceed on these, is always deemed a mark of folly. Now unless we are privileged to play the fool in religion, we must regulate ourselves by the same or like expectations from Almighty God.

Far from thinking that the numberless blessings conferred on such a variety of creatures have exhausted the paternal affection of God, the experience we ourselves and others have of his kindness, ought the more to encourage our trust and confidence in him. The unspeakable satisfaction, and great variety of benefits, flowing, in the natural course of things, from the service of God, may perhaps be considered as a sufficient reward of all our obedience; yet will be no obstruction to the hopes a good man entertains of a more complete happiness from so great and so bountiful a master: as, on the other hand, the disasters which bad men meet with, in their vitious pursuits, are so far from pacifying their consciences, that, on the contrary, they awaken the most dreadful apprehensions of yet greater misery. Our expectations

expectations of rewards and punishments must be regulated by our conceptions of the wisdom, power, and goodness of God; and the dignity and rectitude of the divine government, and must therefore be immensely great; and these expectations are so rational, so just, and natural, that one may defy a thinking man, if the subject comes full in his view, to exclude them from his thoughts.

C H A P. III.

The same subject continued.

IT might be proper in this place to take notice of the many rash attacks on the doctrine of future retribution made by Lord Shaftesbury in his *Characteristics*. But his Lordship hath fully answered himself in a few pages of his *Inquiry*; to which the reader is referred.

We do not justify those divines who, in pleading the cause of religion, confine themselves to the principle of self-love; and will shew, in the course of this Appeal, that the Christian revelation addresses every

every spring of the human mind, the moral sense in particular, with an energy and force superior to that of the most sublime poets and philosophers; and in the mean time must take the liberty of observing, that if our free-thinkers could dispense with the pleasure of making the multitude stare at their bold positions, they had no occasion to quarrel with a doctrine so friendly to virtue, and so agreeable to the natural sentiments of mankind.

How far a regard to self-interest may be indulged, and whether there can be any such thing as disinterested virtue, are questions fit for the curious. But that every principle of the rational soul favourable to virtue, ought to be cherished, and that every conceit and delusion prejudicial to its interests, ought to be checked, will be agreed to by every man of sense.

That virtue hath an innate beauty and dignity, that the human heart is susceptible of impressions from its supreme excellence, and that public teachers are bound to touch this spring of action with their utmost skill, cannot be disputed; but we should be fools indeed, if, on these considerations,

siderations, we slighted the consequences of vice and virtue in this life or the next.

There goes a story of an enthusiast, who, with a vessel of water in one hand, and a choffer of coals in the other, called upon his fellow-citizens to bear witness to his zeal; and having poured out the water and scattered the coals in their presence, made this strange declaration, "Burn heaven, and quench the flames of hell, I will adhere inviolably to the service of my God." The man might be sincere; but who would trust more to his disinterested zeal, than to the sober piety of another, who honestly avows a just regard to the rewards and punishments of another life, and is animated to good actions by the one, and restrained from vice by the other?

Superficial thinkers make no distinction betwixt being influenced by the glory and happiness of the other world, and of the present; though the difference is great. The interest and honours of this life are near at hand, and full in view, operate so forcibly, and in a manner so mechanical and necessary, that, strictly speaking, the
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good actions produced by such motives are no virtues; and, however beneficial in their effects, do not intitle him who performs them to praise or reward from God or man. The glory and happiness of another life are, on the other hand, out of sight, and at a distance, and derive all their power in determining the will, not from any blind impulse on sense or imagination, but from the free and frequent, and often the long and painful, exertion of our nobler powers, such exertions, to wit, as are deemed rational and manly; and discover that greatness of mind, and grandeur of character, which make one a proper object of esteem and love with God and man. Now, had Lord Shaftesbury attended to this manifest difference, he would not have affirmed, as he does, that the man who acts the virtuous part from a view to the glory and happiness of another life, discovers no more worth in so doing, than in any other bargain of interest.

C H A P. IV.

The same subject continued.

BEfore we finish this part of the Appeal, we must enter a complaint against the learned of both sides, for their injurious manner of treating this interesting and important subject. In place of setting full in the view of mankind a truth which none pretend to doubt of, and about which no man can be unconcerned, namely, That we are accountable to God for our conduct, the friends of religion and virtue have ransacked all nature for arguments to prove, that we shall actually be called to account; and have thereby turned the attention of mankind from their proper business, to an endless fruitless dispute, about what is possible and impossible in nature, and may or may not come to pass. Was this well advised? If a man is desirous of certain information concerning this great event, let him consult the revelation which God has made of his mind; or if he is not satisfied about

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that, let him consult the sentiments of his own heart, about his being liable to account, and take such measures as prudence will dictate in a case of so great moment, and of which he cannot entertain a doubt. But if he will do neither, your reasoning is vain: for the man is a fool, and his folly is voluntary, and therefore incurable, or not to be cured by the art of reasoning. For by the same skill with which he eludes obligations to hold himself in readiness to render an account, he will baffle all the arguments you can bring in proof that he shall be counted with: or should you even convince him, he will still continue to play the fool; for nothing is more common than for men (and those too of good understanding) to act in direct contradiction to what they believe and expect. No man doubts that he must die; and yet multitudes, even of sensible persons, labour incessantly for riches and honours, and a variety of temporal enjoyments, as if they thought they were to live for ever! Do not we hear old people talk of their being on the brink of the grave, and forming schemes at the same time for years to come! And are there not multitudes who

who believe, that the Lord Jesus Christ will come in the glory of his Father, to render to every man according to his deeds; and yet talk, and act, and behave, as if they believed no such thing! So that the folly of mankind does not arise from want of information or conviction of the part they ought to act, but from a corruption of heart, that is not to be cured by the art of reasoning. Our ablest advocates for religion and virtue, judging rather from abstract ideas than from plain facts, have long been of opinion, that the judgement being convinced, the will follows of course; and have accordingly devoted themselves to the study of logic and rhetoric, to the neglect of that noble art of touching the springs of the heart, so much practised by the sages of antiquity, and have thereby lost the influence they ought to have on the minds of men: for it is the heart, the heart alone, under just direction, and put into full motion, that has power to balance the animal affections, and check the blind impulses of the will. A sensible address to the heart, accompanied with proper directions to qualify men for meeting death with firm-

ness and hope, would do more good, and be more relished by men of sense, than all the volumes (and they are not few) that have been written on the controversy in all the ages of the world.

May we not ask, what it is that modern free-thinkers propose by combating a doctrine so consonant to all our ideas of just administration? The arguments for a future state insisted on by the friends of religion, they say, are not conclusive. Be it so.—What have they to offer that is worthy the attention of a man of sense? They do not know whether death is the extinction of our being, or a suspension only of life and motion, out of which we may awake as out of a sleep. They cannot tell whether God will or will not (for as to his power there is no question) continue our existence beyond the grave; nor do they know what scenes of happiness or misery we may go through in future ages. They cannot shew the least impossibility, the least difficulty, the least incongruity, in our being continued the same identical persons after death, and being placed in circumstances of happiness

ness or misery in exact conformity to our character and actions.

It is easy, too easy indeed, to divert thoughtless men from their proper business by idle disputes; and it is not impossible to give some men an artificial way of thinking, differing little in its effect from real infidelity: but to be infidels indeed, or to create a suspense of mind that shall destroy their hopes and fears of futurity, is a task of a different kind, for which our ablest disputants will find themselves but poorly provided. Nothing less than an express revelation, attested equally well at least with the gospel, can satisfy a man of sense, that he is not to be called to account, or balance those hopes and fears of an exact retribution which are natural to every thinking being, and not to be extinguished but with the extinction of rationality.

In order to a just estimate of the labours of modern free-thinkers, it would be fit to make the experiment on a dying man, and observe how he would relish their bold talk. A dying man, you will say, is under a panic, and therefore not fit to judge. But if they cannot afford relief to the mind

mind at that season, what are they good for? To blow up the mind with false courage, and ill-grounded confidence, when the danger is at a distance, and to desert us then when we stand most in need of support, is not fair. An unexperienced youth, of lively imagination, and ungovernable passions, will listen with pleasure to the ridicule thrown upon the sage admonitions of tutors and friends; but when the disorder of his affairs give him the prospect of bankruptcy and a prison, how will he then regard those who have seduced him? We laugh at our ancestors, who suffered themselves to be tricked out of their estates by fictitious fears of futurity, and listen with pleasure to speculations about the essence of the soul, and the ultimate end and object of the divine government, at the hazard of our immortal souls.

The truth is, that we are accountable to God for all our actions, and for all the talents wherewith we are intrusted, and are liable to be summoned to account, perhaps the next year, the next month, or next day; and to amuse ourselves with idle disputes,

disputes, about what is possible or impossible in the nature of things, when we ought to be employed in holding ourselves in readiness to render account, is a degree of folly far exceeding that of those contentious lawyers mentioned by Mr Addison, who, from the love of contradiction, run the hazard of being knocked on the head by the fall of Westminster-hall.

To think that prosperous villany shall go unpunished, and that they who have sacrificed their ease, their peace, their reputation, and interest, to the duties of religion and morality, shall have no other reward than the satisfaction of doing so, great as that may be supposed; and that all things shall come alike to all, as we see it frequently does, without any distinction betwixt the pious and the profane, the just and the unjust, is so incredible, so incompatible with all our ideas of a wise and just administration, and so shocking to common sense, that a man of judgment will take it for granted, that he is to be counted with, and act accordingly.

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Hear then the conclusion of the whole matter :—Fear God, and keep his commandments : for this is the whole of man. For God will bring every work into judgement, with every secret thought, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

BOOK

BOOK IX.

A refutation of Objections to the evidence of Primary Truths.

C H A P. I.

The belief of primary truths is founded on grounds that are indisputable; but that of bigots is not.

IT is pretended, that we cannot easily distinguish the firm belief claimed in favour of primary truths, from the extravagant confidence of dogmatists.—

But this is mere pretence; for there is no such thing as believing secondary truths in the manner in which we believe first principles. A mathematician believes the truth of the proposition he has demonstrated, and believes it firmly; but not (if he is a man of sense) with the same firmness with which he believes the principles of that science; because he knows, that in some one or other link of the chain of rea-

soning by which he has reached his conclusion, he may have committed a mistake. He is positive, that he has committed no mistake; but still he knows, that he is liable to mistake; and therefore must abate a little of that confidence with which he believes first principles, and content himself with that firmness of faith which belongs to just reasoning. A mathematician, or any other just reasoner, knows, or may know if he will, the difference betwixt secondary truths and first principles, that in pronouncing on the former he is liable to many mistakes, but in judging of the latter he is liable to none, provided he gives due attention, and is in the free and full exercise of his reason. In judging of these, you have the authority of reason, without reserve or limitation; but in judging of those, you have the authority of reason only on condition that you have committed no mistake in any step of the reasoning.

There are not wanting instances of persons, and sometimes those of good understanding, who hold disputable points, yea, and vulgar prejudices, with as firm a faith as is due to axioms, and do actually mis-
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take them for axioms; but the mistake may be easily pointed out, by inquiring into the grounds of their belief. Ask a bigot, why he is so positive about the truth of some favourite opinion he has adopted, and he will tell you, that he has always believed it, and has always heard it affirmed, and never contradicted by those he conversed with;—or that it hath been universally believed by the learned of all ages, and by all wise and good men;—or that it hath an inviolable connection with certain truths of which he cannot doubt. Ask a man of sense, why he believes his own existence and identity, or the existence, identity, and obvious qualities, of the beings around him;—that the table, for instance, is higher than the chair;—that fire will consume wood, and other combustibles: or ask him, why he believes that he ought to reverence the wise, and love the good, and fear the terrible; that he ought to despise a coward, abhor a villain, and be grateful to a benefactor: put these and a great many such questions to a man of sense, and he will answer you, That reason requires him to believe these truths;

and that he should be highly unreasonable, and indeed a fool, to entertain a doubt concerning them. Such then is the difference betwixt the belief of a man of sense and a dogmatist. And will any one pretend that he does not see the difference? Allowing that the confidence in both is the same, yet the ground of the confidence is very different. The dogmatist has reason for believing, and for believing with a good degree of firmness; but he has reason also for doubting: for though it is not probable, that the learned, and the wise, and the good, of all ages, should have been mistaken, it is possible they may. And though it is probable the proposition believed has an inviolable connection with some first principle, it is possible there may be no connection at all, or the connection may not be such as it is believed to be; and therefore, though he may be indulged the liberty of enjoying his opinion until he discover his mistake; yet must he abate a good deal of the violence with which he entertains it. This perhaps he will not, but as a man of sense he can, and as a man of candour he ought to do, and learn to content himself

himself with that firmness of faith which belongs to just reasoning. There are secondary truths inviolably connected with first principles, and resulting immediately from them, with such clear and undoubted evidence as is not to be distinguished from the evidence which attends first principles; and to these the same firmness of faith is due as to the principles from which they result: but no such belief can be claimed in favour of truths deduced by reasoning, even in mathematics; and much less in other sciences, where the reasoning neither is nor can be so precisely just.

On the other hand, a man of sense, while he enjoys the free exercise of his reason, could not, if he would, entertain a doubt of first principles. Should he attempt (which by the by is an absurd, unnatural, and indeed an impious experiment) to convince himself, that the table is lower than the chair he sits on, that the fire will not burn his hand, that he does not actually exist, or that he who exists now is not the same person he was yesterday, he finds that reason is against him, and that he cannot, without a crime, revolt

volt against the authority of reason. Of this he has the same evidence that he has of the light of the sun at mid-day. He can lie, he can prevaricate, he can abuse his understanding; but he cannot do it, if he is not indeed a fool, without being conscious of doing a very bad thing.

There are instances of persons of good understanding believing great nonsense with great sincerity; but this does not in the least affect the authority of reason, or the credit due to first principles; because these cases are singular, and easily accounted for. We hear of a foreign nobleman, of blameless life and distinguished literature, who holds conversations with angels on disputable points of philosophy and theology; and have heard of a pious and judicious divine, who could name the time when his immortal soul was extinguished: but we know what to think of these cases. The persons affected deserve no blame, and ought not to be tampered with; because they have the same evidence for what they affirm that any one can have for the truth of axioms, namely, an internal feeling of the strongest kind. There are instances also, in
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common life, of persons, otherwise of good understanding, who, in certain cases, have adopted false maxims from which they will not depart. But neither does this weaken the confidence which every man of sense puts in the maxims of wise and just conduct. The scripture also speaks of men of a reprobate mind, who are given up to believe lies in religion and morality; but all these are singularities, and give no countenance to bad men who would gladly elude the force of primary truths.

If any one tells you, that he knows no essential difference betwixt vice and virtue, and sees no reason why he should not indulge himself in any pleasure he can take with safety, you have just ground to suspect him of villany; for it is ten to one he lies. Or if he has in reality wrought himself into this way of thinking, he has done it with a villanous intention; and you may still hold him for a villain. — After all, we cannot tell with certainty, how far repeated efforts of the understanding, aided by a secret bias in the will, and countenanced by false learning, may go in forming a false judgement of things; and

and therefore ought not rashly to question the veracity of modern sceptics, who tell us, that they see no value in virtue beyond what it derives from utility, and know no reason why an exact retribution of the just and the unjust should be expected under the government of an all-perfect sovereign: but we have good reason to think, that something lies dormant in their minds to which we may appeal; assuring them, that if they will release that prisoner they have held so long in unjust captivity, they may soon get a glimpse of the truth; and proceeding honestly and fairly by the views they have obtained, may come at last to see primary truths in their native light, and to believe, with a firmness of faith that does not belong to truths deducible from first principles by trains of reasoning.

Modern free-thinkers are professed enemies, but secret abettors, of bigotry: for by confounding reason with reasoning, and primary with secondary truths, they lead weak minds, either to believe nothing with firmness, or firmly to believe every thing they are taught; and as the last of the two suits best the disposition

disposition of mankind, it will be found the upshot of all their labour. Whereas, if those of capacity would take the trouble of acquainting men with the true grounds of belief, and of teaching them to proportion their faith to the strength of evidence, they would banish dogmatism and scepticism at once. For a shameful ignorance of the nature of things is the mother of both.

C H A P. II.

All primary truths, however various in other respects, have the same, that is, absolute evidence.

WE shall be asked, Whether the primary truths of religion and morality have the same evidence with mathematical axioms? The proper answer to which question is, That, in some respects, they have, and in other respects they have not; but that this does not derogate in the least from the credit due to the primary truths of religion and morality, as there

are not two things in nature the same, or similar, in all respects.

We are told of a conversation between the Queen of Prussia and the famous Leibnitz, in the gardens of Hanover; in which the Philosopher defied the Queen to shew him any two things in nature the same, or similar, in all respects; and after repeated trials, pointed out some unmarked fibre, or some varying vein, by which every flower, and leaf, and blade of grass, is distinguished from another. — And indeed the immensity of the divine wisdom is displayed in such variety, that, on strict inspection, you shall not find any two things the same, or similar, in all respects. Our ideas, therefore, of sameness, or similarity, must be confined to a few essential qualities in all subjects which come under observation; and these we shall find take place in all primary truths. All have the same, that is, absolute evidence, and are thereby distinguished from secondary truths; whose evidence, however great, is not absolute. But notwithstanding this agreement, some peculiarities may be pointed out, by which primary truths differ from one other.

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The common opinion is, that mathematical axioms have this advantage over all other primary truths, that it is impossible to conceive the opposite to them; whereas it is easy to conceive the opposite to any other truth. But this opinion appears ill founded; because it is not only possible, but very practicable, to form a conception of the opposite to a mathematical axiom. To form a conception of a proposition, and to judge of its truth, are different acts of the mind; and one must precede the other, though in many cases so quickly and imperceptibly, as to escape the observation even of philosophers. Before you can pronounce on the truth of any proposition, you must understand the terms, you must compare them in your thoughts, and form a clear conception of the proposition, and then pronounce.

If the proposition is self-evident, your assent must immediately follow your conception: but still the acts are different; and if you attend to it, you will find it extremely easy to form a conception of the opposite to what you believe. But that it is not impossible to form a conception of the opposite to mathematical axioms, ap-

pears evidently from hence, that, in all reasoning *ab absurdo*, mathematicians proceed on absurd suppositions; and when that species of reasoning is carried to its utmost length, he who reasons must form conceptions in opposition to the axioms of mathematics.

The difference, then, between mathematical axioms and other primary truths, does not arise from the impossibility of conceiving the opposite of the one, and not of the other; but seems rather to arise from this, that in judging of mathematical axioms, you see the grounds on which you proceed, which you do not see in judging of many other truths on which you pronounce with equal certainty.

When you pronounce the table to be higher than the chair that is near it, the relation of height betwixt these objects is perceived as clearly as the objects themselves; and the truth you pronounce is allowed to be an object of intuition, and to have its evidence in itself; but when you affirm the chair on which you lay your hand to be a material substance, you proceed by the authority of reason, but do not see the grounds on which you pronounce.

nounce. The qualities of the chair are an object to your senses, but the substance is no object to any faculty of which you are possessed. Reason obliges you to affirm its reality; but it is no object of intuition; nor can the truth you affirm be called, in strictness of speech, a self-evident truth; for your idea of substance is extremely faint and obscure, if you can be said to have any idea of it at all. When you affirm, that two and three make five, you not only proceed on the authority of reason, but have as clear a perception of the numbers you pronounce on, and of the relation they bear to one another, as you have of any object; but when you affirm your own existence or identity, you have equal authority from reason for what you pronounce, and do therefore pronounce with equal certainty, but have no idea, or but a faint and obscure idea, of that on which you pronounce; for neither your existence nor identity can be called objects of intuition; nor can the truths you affirm, however indubitably certain, be called self-evident, or, in strictness of speech, be said to have their evidence in themselves.

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We have of late been taught to measure certainty by our conceptions, and to proportion our belief to our ideas ; but when the operations of the rational soul are more narrowly looked into, and better understood than they are at present, and men are more accustomed to the authority of reason, they shall find themselves obliged to believe many realities in nature, of which they have no conception, or but faint, obscure, and imperfect conceptions. And then we shall be relieved from many frivolous and fruitless inquiries about what we neither do nor can understand ; and shall learn to form our sentiments and actions by obvious and indubitable truths.

Reason, like other skilful pedagogues, sometimes indulges us with a clear view of the grounds of our belief ; and at other times requires us to believe, without giving us this satisfaction : and we, like untoward scholars, shew a backwardness to believe when this indulgence is withheld ; but gain nothing by our presumption ; for as soon as we begin to hesitate, we find ourselves abandoned of reason, and run into nonsense. The learned have

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all along laid too great stress on reasoning, and too little on the authority of reason; and of late we have been encouraged to doubt the existence of power, because we do not see, and cannot demonstrate, the connection between cause and effect: but this is learned nonsense, and so are all the surmises that can be offered against indubitable truths.

He who tells me, that this is not a table, that the pen I hold between my fingers is no reality, and that I who am now writing am not the same person who was lately asleep, and neither wrote nor thought, insults my understanding as much as he who tells me, that two and three make four, and not five; and I am bound to reject the first proposition with the same disdain with which I reject the last, and have the same authority for doing so.

You say, that you have the authority of reason for believing that two and three make five; and are so constituted, that you must believe your own existence and identity, with many other capital truths. But do you find one thing in your constitution authorising your belief of one set of truths, and another thing authorising the belief

belief of another set of truths? Or do you know any thing which authorises your belief of either, besides that capacity of pronouncing on obvious truth, called *common sense*, by which you are distinguished from idiots and the lower animals? And if you do not, what occasion to mention the difference between mathematical axioms and other primary truths, (let the difference be as it may)? for one must either admit all obvious truths, or fall under the imputation of folly and nonsense.

Indeed, if one inclines to set aside the authority of reason, and deliver himself over to fancy, he may use what freedoms he will with primary truths, but not with safety to his character. It is but too common to oppose conjectures, suppositions, and mere fictions, to obvious truths and indubitable facts, not only in reasoning about religion and morality, but in all kinds of reasoning, and even in business: but the practice is base, and ought to be checked with severity by the friends of truth and good sense. If a man discovers an incapacity to distinguish betwixt conjecture and certainty, paradoxical conceits and obvious truth, he may be treated as

a fool: but if he goes about with design, to make chimeras pass for realities with himself, or others, he deserves a treatment of a different kind; for he is guilty of the same fraudulent practice with those who circulate false coin.

Dr Reid hath put an effectual stop to this artifice of sceptics, by pointing out three powers of the mind evidently distinct, and easily distinguished. By simple perception, we apprehend an object that is real and present; by memory, we recollect what is no longer present, but real; by imagination, we figure to ourselves an object that neither hath, nor ever had, existence, but of which we form an idea almost as clear and strong as of real objects. Now he must be very weak who cannot distinguish the different operations of these different powers of the human mind; and he must be very disingenuous who, in his account of things, would make one pass for the other. To confound the last with the first, or to procure the same regard for both, is the great aim of modern sceptics, and may be called their fort; from which, however, it is easy to dislodge them.

C H A P. III.

In judging of any subject, no regard must be had to arbitrary suppositions, when opposed to known facts or indubitable truths.

ONE may indulge the liberty of fancying at mid-day, that the light of the sun is extinguished, and that there is nothing but darkness around him; but he ought not to admit the least suspicion that this is the state of things. At midnight he may fancy to himself, that the hemisphere is enlightened, and that he sees an hundred objects which he does not see; but he ought to beware of giving the least degree of credit to such imaginations.

You can easily conceive, what you do not, and cannot believe. There is no difficulty in conceiving a mountain of gold in your neighbourhood; but you would demand some evidence before you can believe it. There is nothing to hinder any gentleman, even in this northern climate, from figuring to himself the most delicious
groves

groves of oranges and citrons, stocked with birds of the most beautiful feathers, and melodious voices, and watered by a crystal stream running upon jasper, agates, and carbuncles; but, madness apart, I defy him to believe it even possible. We have no difficulty in conceiving the story of the Brobdingnags and Lilliputians, as Swift has given it, or Homer's account of Polyphemus; but it would take a huge measure of faith to believe them. Epicurus, after setting his atoms a-going, finds no difficulty in imagining a philosophical dance, which, in boundless time and space, would produce whatever he pleased, this whole system, for instance, with all its furniture. And Lucretius has written a fine poem on that hypothesis, which has been, and will be, the admiration of ages: but the great difficulty is in believing; and one may be bold to affirm, that no man in his senses can believe these things to be either true or possible.

Though certain philosophers do not attend to it, something more than simple conception is necessary to create belief, even evidence. There are credible and incredible conceptions. There are marks of

undoubted truth, and of palpable absurdity; and every one who enjoys the perception common to rational beings will distinguish the one from the other, reject the one with contempt, and acquiesce in the other. Had this been duly attended to, the difference betwixt mathematical axioms and other obvious truths would not have been insisted on: for if sceptics contended for the possibility of conceiving, without believing, the opposite of any moral or theological axiom, it might be allowed with great ease, and sufficient safety, because such conceptions do not affect the truth of the action; but if they claim belief to monstrous, absurd, and chimerical conceptions, or pretend to give them credit themselves, they and their opinions would be treated with the contempt they deserve. Does not every one know, that madmen, and none but they, are capable of giving belief to such conceptions? and do not all agree on this as the characteristical difference between a wise man and a fool?

We frankly allow the distinction between mathematical axioms and other primary truths. We freely indulge sceptics the

the liberty of forming conceptions in opposition to the primary truths of religion, provided they regard them as absolutely incredible; with this caution, however, that they do not entertain them too fondly, lest they get such vivid conceptions as may have all the effect of serious belief. Don Quixote is represented as a man of honour, and of no contemptible parts; but by dwelling too long, and with too great pleasure, on unnatural fictions, his understanding was crazed; and in that particular he turned out a downright madman. It is also said, that a liar, by repeating his own lies too often, and with too much self-satisfaction, comes at last to believe them to be true. And the thing is not improbable: for there is a habit in judging as well as acting; and as the memory may receive the impression of a thing that has been often inculcated so deep as never to wear out; so the judgment may, by a habit of thinking, get a wrong cast, which never can be overcome. God threatens some very bad men with sending them strong delusions, so that they shall believe a lie; which threatening may receive full execution, without any miraculous

miraculous interposition, by leaving them merely to the natural effects of their own folly and perverseness: for we see some who have perverted their judgement, if not to the degree of believing palpable falsehoods and lies, yet so far as renders them incapable of giving full assent to the most obvious and important truths.

It were to be wished, that they who are charged with the care of forming the minds and manners of men, paid more regard than they do to the law of habit, which has an influence on the faculties of their souls, as well as the members of their bodies, and on their judgement as well as their affections and memory, and indeed on the sentiments and actions of all men. Children ought to be early taught to distinguish between fiction and reality, between arbitrary suppositions and known facts, between obvious truth and palpable absurdity, and between the different reception due to each. All possible encouragement ought to be given to a rational and just, and all manner of discouragement to a foolish and nonsensical, way of thinking. No pleasantry, no vivacity, no appearance of wit and humour, ought to atone

atone for nonsense on any subject, especially on those of the greatest weight and importance. It were even to be wished, that the civil magistrate were authorised to put a stigma on palpable absurdity in subjects where the honour of God and the interest of mankind are deeply concerned : but as this might be dangerous, it is also unnecessary ; for when the boundaries of obvious truth and palpable absurdity are more studied, and better understood, this sentence will be executed by the unanimous voice of men of judgement ; and then some writings, otherwise intitled to immortality, will meet a severe doom. The nonsense interwoven in them will, as Archbishop Tillotson speaks, prove “ a millstone hanged about their necks to sink them to the bottom.”

CHAP.

C H A P. IV.

Our ideas of divine truth are not more obscure or imperfect, than are our ideas of numberless realities in nature on which we proceed without hesitation.

IT is common to complain of having but imperfect, faint, and obscure ideas of the objects of religion, and to plead this in excuse of the weakness of our belief. — But this we are to regard as one of the many proofs we have, that men are not governed in religion by the same rules of good sense by which they proceed in the common affairs of life: for we hear none, whether learned or unlearned, complain of the imperfect, faint, and obscure ideas, they have of the invisible powers of nature, which they believe to be real, and on the belief of which every branch of business is founded. The unlearned, you will say, proceed by habit, custom, and association of ideas, without any knowledge or belief of the powers of nature. But in that you are mistaken; for the meanest

meanest mechanic would think himself affronted by your imputing to him Mr Hume's hypothesis. A bombardier would laugh in your face, if you insinuated a doubt, that gun-powder hath an explosive power of driving a cannon-ball or a bomb to a great distance, and doing great execution. A watchmaker, or a gunsmith, would think the man mad who doubted, that a steel-spring had power to produce a vast variety of movements, however difficult it may be to account for that power. All the disciples of Sir Isaac Newton believe the reality of a law of gravitation that maintains the harmony of the spheres, as firmly as they believe the articles of the creed, without being able to give any other account of the matter than may be given of any mysterious doctrine of religion. They know and believe, that the law exists and acts; but further they know not.

No one doubts the reality of matter; yet Mr Locke himself is hard put to it by Bishop Stillingfleet on this subject, and forced to own, that our ideas of matter and substance are not direct, and next to none at all. On repeated trials, we find,

that stone, timber, and other such substances, have no inclination to shift their place, but may, by an impulse, be made to fly to a distance with great velocity. Now, what is this magical power called *impulse*, which is thus communicated from one object to another? Is it an object of sense? Can we, by investigation, trace the cause from the effect? or can we form an idea of the manner of its existence and operation? *That* we cannot; and yet we cannot doubt its reality.

Nothing is more real, nothing more certain, and nothing more mysterious, than cohesion of parts. Particles of matter adhere so firmly one to another, as not to be separated without great force; yet once the separation is made, they shall never again unite so firmly. Here is a law of nature of which we cannot doubt, that calls for attention, and excites our wonder. Something that bears a near resemblance to animal life hath escaped, is vanished, and never can be recalled!

Upon the slightest attention to himself, a man finds that he can move his legs and arms at pleasure; and, what is more, that he hath a thousand muscles under his absolute

solute command; and, to his great astonishment, finds, that these muscles, whose structure he does not understand, and whose mechanism he cannot explain, he puts into motion with the same ease and skill with which an expert general moves the several battalions under his command. Here is a mystery not inferior to any thing we believe in religion. Shall we disbelieve it because we do not understand it? or shall we attempt to understand it in order to our believing it? Common sense forbids both. We know no connection betwixt a *Fiat* of our will and the motion of our muscles; nor have we the least idea or conception of the manner how the one operates upon the other; but, if we are not fools indeed, must rest, without hesitation or demur, in the belief of a truth for which we have undoubted evidence.

Does it become creatures who know so little of the objects around them, to complain of their imperfect faint ideas of those above them, and on that account to quarrel with primary truths? They vouch the phenomena for the invisible powers of nature; but when the same phenomena are

adduced for the invisible things of God, they pretend ignorance, and, through a pedantic affectation of superior sagacity, give themselves airs of infidelity or scepticism. They have no idea, they say, of Deity, or divine operation; but forget that they have no idea of their own identity, and manner of existence. They complain of the imperfect, obscure, and faint ideas, they have, or can have, of the laws of an invisible world; but seem not aware of the obscure, faint, and imperfect ideas, they have of all the objects around them, which yet they believe, and must believe, to be real. Because the operations of nature are familiar to their thoughts, they think they understand them; and because they are little accustomed to think of religion, they call it mysterious; but are equally ignorant of both, have equal authority for both, and are bound by the authority of reason and common sense to acquiesce in the one as well as in the other; and would do so, if they were not misled by the futile conceits of minute philosophers.

The philosopher, the mathematician, the physician, and also the husbandman, go on in their different pursuits, without
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any complaint of the obscure, imperfect, and faint ideas, they have of the laws of nature; and we would proceed in the same manner with regard to religion, if we were in as good earnest as they: but *that* we are not; and here lies the defect; and the true ground of complaint is not of the faintness or obscurity of our ideas, but the want of proper dispositions to fulfil our duty, or, in plain language, the want of uprightness of heart.

A regard to reputation and present interest obliges men to give attention to the laws of nature; but they are under no necessity of regarding the objects of religion, but from a sense of duty; and as this is extremely weak in the bulk of mankind, so is their attention to and belief of the primary truths of religion. There are times and seasons when most men, sceptics in particular, give deep attention to these objects, and then they are strong believers, and much disposed to be religious; but when the fright is over, they relapse into their former infidelity or scepticism. Whether God might not have ordered things so, that men would have been laid under the same necessity of regulating

ting themselves by the laws of religion, as they are by the laws of nature, is an impertinent question; because we know he will not: and as we also know that he expects and requires, that we should act this part of free choice, and from a pure regard to duty, it becomes us to conform to his will. And the only advice to be given to men who complain of obscure and faint ideas of religion is this; that they would act the same rational part with regard to religion which they see other men act in the various occupations of life; and then there will be an end of their complaints. They who exercise themselves continually in keeping a conscience void of offence towards God and towards all men; have as clear ideas of the obligations of religion and morality, as physicians or husbandmen have of the laws of nature.

CHAP.

C H A P. V.

The little attention we give to the primary truths of religion and morality, and not any defect of evidence, is the true cause of the weakness of our belief.

AFTER all that can be said for the evidence of primary truths, and admitting that the first principles of religion and morality are on a footing with the first principles of all the arts and sciences, and with the maxims of just conduct of every kind, it is alledged, that there is still ground of complaint, that those of the best understanding, and also of good intention, cannot believe the principles of religion and morality so firmly as they do other primary truths. But it is not uncommon for men to amuse themselves with impossibilities, and then complain of a disappointment; and, what is yet worse, to complain of impossibilities of their own creation.

We are accustomed from our infancy to pronounce on the known laws of nature;
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the power in fire, for instance, to consume combustibles, and the power in animals to move hither and thither at pleasure; and repeat this judgement every day, and almost every hour, and by so doing, acquire a firmness of faith on these subjects, that repels the surmises of sceptics with sovereign contempt. But being little exercised in contemplating those displays of the divine perfections with which we are encompassed, or the supreme excellence of moral worth, our faith is weak, we find ourselves in danger of being overthrown by every objection, and seem to stand in need of proofs, reasons, and arguments, to support us. Is there any thing here that may not easily be accounted for?

Though we do not resolve our belief of primary truths into habit, and association of ideas; yet these are laws of nature that deserve attention; and without due attention to them, the influence of truth on the human mind cannot be understood. We often hear things said of the little force of truth on the minds of men, that are quite incredible. We often wonder at the little correspondence that appears betwixt mens judgement and practice; and

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as often have occasion to wonder at the little influence which the fullest conviction of our own judgement hath on our temper and manners. But these difficulties are easily solved by a tolerable acquaintance with the law of habit : for truths, however evident, however interesting, however important, that are seldom viewed with attention, make but a slight impression, and have but a weak influence; whereas truths that are the object of habitual attention, take fast hold of the mind, are firmly believed, and have a considerable influence on the conduct.

From the wonderful feats performed by jugglers and rope-dancers, we readily allow the immense power of habit in forming the limbs for action; and from the no less wonderful behaviour of the ancient Lacedemonians, and modern Americans, under torture, we also allow, that the strength of the mind is as capable of augmentation by exercise as that of the body: but if any one will affirm, that the judging power may be enlarged and strengthened by repeated acts, he shall hardly gain credit even with the learned, though nothing is more certain. Do not states-

men, generals, physicians, and even mechanics; acquire an exactness as well as quickness of discernment, by exercise, which others cannot pretend to, and which they could not have reached, without repeated acts of judgement? He who hath distinguished fifty times betwixt obvious truth and arbitrary conceit, pronounces with a celerity and firmness fifty times greater than that with which another pronounces, who has discerned the difference but once only; and he who hath distinguished an hundred times, pronounces with quickness and firmness an hundred times greater, &c. To expect, therefore, that one who hath not exercised his judgement on any subject, should all at once attain a discernment equal to his who hath, betrays great ignorance of the power of habit.

One observes from his infancy great respect paid to rank and titles, and cannot avoid annexing an idea of dignity to these objects. He sees the rich courted, feared, and envied, and possessed withal of many of the conveniencies of life; and of course associates the idea of happiness with that of riches. You can easily satisfy

fy him, that rank and titles do not confer dignity, and that riches cannot procure happiness, or that the happiness is at best but uncertain and transient; but if you expect that this conviction, however complete, that may be conveyed in a short space of time, should prove a balance to a way of thinking he hath so long been accustomed to, you shall be much mistaken. Scarce is there one born under a constitution of government where honours are hereditary, who does not value himself and others upon their birth. If the man is not a fool, he will acknowledge, that he can derive no worth from the virtue, and much less from the rank, of his predecessors; but that does not hinder him from raising his crest on mentioning those of high rank, or sinking it on the mention of obscure persons from whom he is descended. Such, and so great, is the influence of custom and habit over the judgement, as well as over the temper and manners of men.

If one is bred in genteel company, he gets not only a facility and promptness in acquitting himself with propriety towards all sorts of persons, but a con-

viction too, that this is right and fit, so deeply imprinted on his mind, as makes him uneasy, if he fails, or seems to fail, in his duty to any one. But do not imagine from hence, that in a short space of time you can give him a conviction equally strong of his obligation to behave with propriety towards God. If you found upon the obviousness of the obligation, and the goodness of his understanding, or even of his disposition, otherwise, you are not enough acquainted with the frame of the human mind. You may as reasonably expect, that a robust man, not accustomed to labour, should equal a porter or a chairman in bearing heavy burdens, as that one not accustomed to judge at all, or accustomed to judge fantastically, should all at once equal him whose judgement has been much exercised on any subject.

Let a man make the Deity an object of habitual attention, and he shall in time attain a belief of his purity and presence, that will prove a counterpoise to the objects of sense and imagination; in transactions of business, let his eye be steadily fixed on the right of the case,
and

and he shall attain sentiments of justice and probity, that will check his selfish affections; and in the enjoyments of life, let him never forget his dignity, and he shall be in little danger from those pleasures that prove the ruin of other people: in a word, let him do justice to himself, and, through a divine direction and influence, he shall attain a belief of primary truths corresponding to their obviousness and importance; but if he will not, there is no remedy.

It may seem a paradox, but is a certain truth, that common sense, as it is indeed more worthy, so is not less capable, of culture, than any other of our faculties.

C H A P. VI.

The behaviour of sceptics towards their master in heaven, is nothing different from the behaviour of dishonest servants towards their earthly masters; and the remedy for both is the same.

Lord Shaftesbury says of himself, and of other licentious writers, that they are not infidels, but weak believers: and says truly; for it is impossible for them to disbelieve the primary truths; though it is probable they are not, and cannot be, strong believers, through a deficiency in common sense, which they have not cultivated duly, and do not seem to hold in great estimation; but, on the contrary, to treat with contempt and neglect, as the characteristic of vulgar minds.

We do not hear, that Newton, Bacon, Locke, and Boyle, were weak believers; but among men of genius of lower rank, we find numbers who seem to make little distinction betwixt primary truths and chimerical

chimerical suppositions. Nor need we be much surpris'd : for in common life, we find multitudes possessed of great acuteness with little judgement, quick in spying faults, alert in devising expedients, forming schemes, and in maintaining their opinions by endless reasonings, who discover at the same time an imbecility, or fluctuation, with regard to first principles, in theory or practice. The principles of common sense and common prudence are laid in every one's mind ; but in some, appear remarkably weak by nature, and become more so through disuse, and want of due culture.

That every wise man carries a fool in his bosom, is the observation of a person of high rank, and well acquainted with human nature in all its forms : and this observation is intitled to our attention on this subject ; for without checking the suggestions of this inmate, few shall reach the firm belief that is due to primary truths. Strange ideas, and combinations of ideas, arise in the minds even of men of sense ; which, the more they are tampered with, disturb them the more : but if, treating them with just contempt, they will

will maintain a right course of conduct, by the direction of their best judgement, they shall in due time get rid of these foreign intruders.

If your friend complains, that his legs have not strength to carry him, or that he is ill received in all the companies he enters into, you will not give yourself much trouble in refuting these absurdities, but advise him to use his limbs freely, and to mind his affairs like other men; not doubting, that if he will act like a man of judgement, he will come in time to think as such. He may have the same aversion to put your advice in practice, that other people have to cross their inclination in other respects; but whether he practise it or not, this will be found the true remedy.

If a man's thoughts have been long ingrossed by objects of sense and imagination, with little attention to Deity, he is not to wonder if he finds his mind in an uncouth posture, on being introduced to an invisible God, and an invisible world: and if he attempts to realize the divine presence, and, in secret devotion, to lay open his heart to his Father in heaven, he is
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not to be surpris'd if his mind should revolt from the exercise, and the nonsense he has been accustomed to should return upon him again and again. But if, under the direction of his best judgement, he will acquit himself with fidelity and propriety, and manfully persist in the exercise, he shall, in due time, attain a belief of primary truths; superior in all respects to what can be obtained from the labours of the learned.

The weak belief of which Lord Shaftesbury complains, and of which many more have cause to complain, is not confined to religion; but takes place in all the duties of common life; and is to be resolved as much, if not much more, into dishonesty of heart, than defect of understanding! There are numbers of people of good understanding, who squander large sums of money to idle and silly purposes, which might, and ought, to have been better employed, without the least idea of their doing any thing amiss. There are known sharpers, and notorious drunkards, who will not believe that this is their character. There are numberless servants, in the families of princes, and in private fa-

milies, addicted to thievish practices, without the least idea, or with exceeding faint ideas, of doing wrong. To argue with these people, is to little good purpose; and the conviction arising from consequences comes often too late: but if they would yield a little to a weak obscure belief of the truth they have at the bottom of their minds, the effect would be happy. The luxurious man would learn to make conscience of the talents he is intrusted with; the knave and the debauchee would see the vile practices to which they are addicted; the pilfering thief would startle at the thought of invading the property of another; and all of them would, in proportion to their progress in right conduct, attain a rectitude of heart, and soundness of judgement, that is otherwise unattainable.

You cannot find one who hath a weaker belief of the primary truths of religion, than the servants of princes, and even of private persons, have of that fidelity they owe to their masters; yet in neither case can men plead weakness of belief in excuse of their faults; for when servants are reproached with pilfering, and especially when

when they find themselves in danger of being detected, they are covered with shame: and, in like manner, when men find themselves in danger of being called to an account for neglecting the duties of religion, they are in the utmost consternation; and even in perfect health and full security, men do not love to be reproached with irreligion; which shews a conviction of the truth at the bottom of their minds, and that the weakness of their faith flows from a shameful defect of understanding, or a more shameful dishonesty of heart.

There is not a servant of so little understanding, as not to know in his conscience, that he ought to be diligent and faithful in his master's business; in his absence as well as in his presence, however much this truth is disregarded by many, and laughed at by some servants; and there is not a man of so little understanding, as not to know, that he is bound to worship and serve his maker, however much this duty is disregarded by many, and laughed at by some people of fashion. There is no material difference betwixt the two cases; nor is there any material difference

in mens way of thinking about obvious obligations, but what they create to themselves by the reception they give to primary truths.

To force the belief of divine or moral truth is impossible, and to feign it is base; but there is nothing base or impracticable in acting upon the belief we have, however weak that belief may be.

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CONCLUSION.

Addressed to Men of Sense and
Probity.

CHAP. I.

IT may appear strange, that so much of this Appeal should be taken up about the primary truths of natural religion, and no care taken to vindicate the truth of the Christian revelation. But be pleased to consider, that the controversy hath of late years undergone a considerable change. Dr Swift, who knew well how to say a shrewd thing, observed some time ago to sceptics, that their reasonings against the truth of Christianity would avail them little, if they did not dismiss all idea of God and religion: and they seem to have taken the hint; for their celebrated writers have, with the shew of zeal against Christianity, employed their utmost ability in undermining the great truths

truths of natural religion. Like the Epicureans of old, they affect to talk of Deity, but strip him of his essential attributes, of those especially which make him the object of hope and fear, and of all those regards that are denominated religious; that so, with as little offence as possible, they may impose on their deluded votaries, and precipitate a people, dissolute enough otherwise, into those miseries which attend the extreme of irreligion.

A sceptic of high rank, employs all the powers of a florid imagination in an hymn to the Deity, without mentioning his love of right and abhorrence of wrong, and without the least hint of his being the rewarder of those who diligently seek him; and with many strong hints against the mean and mercenary practice of recommending ourselves to his favour by a sacred regard to the authority of his laws. Another, of equal rank, and greater boldness, treats all our ideas of the moral perfections and moral government of God as phantastical and presumptuous, assures us there is no occasion to think of a future retribution, and requires us to confine our views to the present state of things.

A philosopher of our own age, who has made as many bold excursions as any of his predecessors, assures us, that there are no *data* in nature whence we can infer the divine attributes; that the beauty, dignity, and supreme excellence ascribed to virtue, is merely ideal; and that all the regard due to it arises from its subserviency to convenience and use; and almost all, with one accord, undertake a demonstration, that men are necessary agents, and therefore not accountable for their actions. It is impossible these writers should gain belief with men of sound understanding; but they have been universally read, and received with applause, and must have made an impression. They have also furnished their readers, and many, too, who never took the trouble of perusing them, with topics of argumentation against primary truths. And this hath its effect; for the shadow of an objection suffices with some, to ward off that serious belief and full conviction of truth, which leads to the practice of religion. And until the surmises of sceptics are dismissed, and the minds of men are put into a capacity of judging of primary truths, it would be
vain

vain to offer them the Christian revelation; for however they might be amused with a dispute about its truth, they are not in a capacity of receiving any benefit from its doctrines.

If the primary truths of natural religion are understood, believed, and admitted, the belief of Christianity will follow of course: but if a man can allow himself to think, that justice and villany, chastity and lewdness, piety and profanity, are the same in the eye of Almighty God, he hath nothing to do with the Christian religion, or with any religion. And if he has any suspicion, that God will not reward the holy and the just, and punish the ungodly and disobedient, he is no better than an Atheist; for he must either believe, that God is not the governor of the world, or (what is worse) that he is not a righteous governor.

If the present attempt to vindicate the truths of natural religion has any good effect, it will be followed with a vindication of the Christian revelation; as the author of the Appeal is persuaded, that the evidence for both is the same: for if it is allowed to be impossible to give due attention

tion to a few phenomena of nature, and doubt of the natural and moral government of God, he hopes he shall make it appear to be equally impossible, in consistency with common sense, to attend to a few observations arising from the face of the scriptures, and doubt of their divine original. But in the present state of things, a defence of Christianity seems to be premature; and a refutation of the surmises of sceptics is of more consequence than is generally thought. Though the distempers of our state are not wholly, or chiefly, yet in some measure they are owing to that spirit of infidelity and irreligion which hath long prevailed, and is now become almost universal. When the Roman republic was arrived at its highest pitch of grandeur, and, through dissoluteness of manners, was brought to the brink of that abyss into which it plunged soon after; it is remarkable, that multitudes of all ranks, and of no contemptible character, adopted the doctrine of Epicurus; and it is worthy of notice, that numbers have appeared among us, beyond what were known in former ages, devoted to pleasure, and to money as the mean of

pleasure, who profess no religion, pay no attention to Deity, do nothing with a view to his approbation, take not the least trouble to shun the things that offend him; but, with high talk about social duties, appear on all occasions as insensible of their obligations to their maker as the dumb cattle. This may be imputed to a variety of causes; but must be owing in a great measure to a wrong way of thinking about religion; because it is incredible, that people of common understanding would act this part, if they seriously believed its primary truths. They consider gross vice as destructive of society, and punishable on that account; and believe, that a decent regard to religious rites is fit and necessary upon several accounts; but carry their views no farther. They do not admit the surmises of sceptics, nor do they reject them, or not with the contempt they deserve. They allow, that the capital doctrines of religion and morality have great appearance of truth or probability, but do not believe them to be absolutely indubitable. They have, in short, no such belief of these truths as would induce them to alter their course,

or

or give them the least disturbance on account of that forgetfulness of God into which they have fallen. What effect an earthquake, or the pestilence, or a formidable French invasion, might have, is uncertain; but it seems agreed, that there is not as much regard to God and a good conscience, as would save the nation in a severe trial; and hardly so much as is necessary for the preservation of decency and good order. And if this is the truth, it demands the serious attention of every good citizen, and indeed of every one who hath the feelings of a man. In vain are all our improvements in commerce, manufactures, and agriculture, if, in the nature of things, and in the righteous judgement of God, we are upon the brink of that dreadful abyss into which the Romans precipitated themselves, through a contempt of the primary truths of religion and morality.

Whether this is indeed the state of these nations, must be left to the judgement of the few who are capable of looking beyond their present gains and present pleasures, to the safety of their country; but that a disbelief, an insensibility, and even

an ignorance of primary truths, is prevalent to an uncommon degree among people of rank and fashion, and, what is most to be regretted, amongst those of otherwise respectable character, is apparent.

There remains, then, no hope under heaven, but in that portion of probity and good sense yet to be found in a people once celebrated for these qualities; and to it we appeal.

C H A P. II.

IF the reader has not got the satisfaction he expected from this Appeal, he must not impute it to any want of evidence in the truths appealed, or of authority in the standard appealed to; but to some defect in the manner in which the truth hath been represented; or perhaps to the manner in which it has been received. The skill of making obvious truth enter the mind as light does the eye, so much practised by the ancients, is, it must be owned, but little known in modern times; and it is also true, that people in these days are more disposed to yield to a multiplicity

tiplicity of reasons and arguments, than to the simple dictates of reason and common sense. Besides, there is a power in the mind not much attended to, which renders of no effect the plainest representations that can be made of the most obvious and interesting truth: for as the bodily eye opens and shuts at pleasure, and takes in more or less of the light of the sun; so does the understanding admit or exclude the truth in whole, or in part, just as you chuse.

You offer a truth to the consideration of your friend, which concerns him much, and the evidence of which, you think, cannot escape his observation; and are surpris'd at the cold reception he gives it. You endeavour to make it yet more plain and palpable, and are again disappointed. He does not reject it: he seems to admit it in some degree, but not in the manner which corresponds to the obviousness of the truth, or the good sense of your friend, and you are at a loss how to account for such conduct; but you do not perceive, and perhaps he does not himself observe, that he exercises this power of opening or shutting his understanding at pleasure,
just

just as we open or shut our eyes, without attending to it.

To the use, or abuse rather, of this power, we must impute the multitude of false and fantastical opinions which in all ages have prevailed among rational beings. To this we must impute the total blindness of the Jewish nation; of whom it is said, that they had eyes and saw not. And to the same cause we must impute the almost total blindness which appears in people of good understanding in this enlightened age: for none are so blind as they who *will* not see.

The great truths of religion are so consonant to the natural sentiments of the human mind, and the opposite absurdities are so ridiculous, that one would think it impossible for any man of sense to hesitate in admitting the one, and rejecting the other; and perhaps, upon a fair comparison, it will be so in some degree: but to procure that full assent to the primary truths of religion which we give to other truths that have no greater evidence, but are more to our taste, is not so easy a matter, and will never be effected till the friends of religion take more pains than they

they do, to conciliate the regards of mankind to the truths they propose.

The apprentices of carpenters, smiths, and shoemakers, readily admit every notice they have concerning the best and most perfect manner of practising those arts by which they are to gain their bread; they also who are devoted to the sciences, drink in those truths with greediness which are fundamental to the science they profess: but the professed votaries of religion and virtue will read and hear, with great gravity and composure, truths the most obvious and important, and admit or exclude them just so far as suits their inclination. For the human mind, like the sensitive plant, shrinks from the slightest touch that is offensive, and shuts itself up against truths that give disturbance. To no purpose, then, or to little purpose, do men busy themselves about religion and morality, if due care is not had to prevent the abuse of this power of the human mind, by those who propose, and those who give attention to, primary truths.

Believing and disbelieving are commonly considered as acts of the mind that are
necessary

necessary and unavoidable, and of consequence imply no merit or demerit; and with regard to truths that are purely speculative; they are so; but with regard to truths that touch the heart, and determine the will, it is quite otherwise. You need no better proof of a disingenuous mind, than a promptness and dexterity in baffling or evading the evidence of plain obligations; nor need you ask a truer symptom of an honest heart, than a frank admission of truths which go cross to inclination. In reality, it is as difficult to take a firm and steady view of truths that make against us, as it is to look steadily on the most disagreeable and loathsome objects; and you will find fewer who have the one capacity than the other, though both may be acquired by manly efforts often repeated.

That life is uncertain, and that death is certain, are truths the most indubitable that can be presented to the mind, and least admitted, through that strong love of life, and aversion to death, so natural to men. When alarming symptoms appear, we are then strong believers, because we are apt to believe the evils we fear; but when

when the fright is over, we entertain the contrary opinion on the slightest grounds imaginable: and nothing is more common than to see men waver, and incline to the favourable side, in opposition to the judgement of friends, of physicians, and even to their own judgement. Is not this a strict proof of the power the mind has of shutting up the understanding at pleasure against the most obvious truths?

The situation one finds himself in on the death of a dear friend, is a curiosity in nature, and much to our present purpose. After hearing his doom pronounced, and after expecting the fatal event with anxiety and fear, for hours, perhaps for days, when it happens, one is struck, not only with new anguish, but with surprise, and stunned, as if something unexpected had happened: and the truth is, something has happened which he did not expect; for in spite of all evidence to the contrary, he entertained the belief and hope, that his friend would recover. Now, if self-love has as much power to blind the understanding as friendship, are we to wonder that bad men do not believe their danger to be such as it is, and will

not admit a full conviction of it till it happens, or till, by a special interposition of Providence, their eyes are opened?

Every one knows the common behaviour of children and servants when they are caught in a trespass, — the firmness with which they repel the charge when it cannot be fixed upon them, and the address with which they evade it when it can. After the truth is brought home in all its force, and all their arguments and evasions are fairly baffled, you will see by their countenance, that they do not admit it in its whole extent, but mould and shape it to their own purpose as nearly as they can. Nor is this to be imputed to the fear of punishment; for they do it often, when an ingenuous acknowledgment of the truth, would not only secure them against punishment, but procure them the good-will of their masters and parents: and one may take it for a just observation in the general, that no human creature will do otherwise, unless he is in a disposition to reform; for no man will give admission to a truth that breeds him disturbance, unless he is willing to make peace

peace with himself by altering his conduct.

You may think, that this aversion to admit the great truths of religion can have place only in bad men: but if by bad men you mean all who are not reconciled to the practice of religion, I am afraid you will take in the whole race, with few exceptions; for the whole mystery of the matter lies in a secret dread which most men have, of being brought under obligations they are unwilling to fulfil. They are neither ignorant of the truth of religion, nor insensible of its obligations, and may be said to believe it in some sort; but apprehending, that if they gave it full admission, they could not answer to themselves for living as they do, they ward off this belief as much as they can. Every one naturally wishes to be in an understanding with himself, and to keep peace within his own breast; and in order to this, must preserve some consistency betwixt his principles and practice; and if he is not willing to bring the last to the first, he will endeavour all he can to bring down his principles to his practice, or not think of the subject at all.

There are people in the world, who, from a sacred regard to truth, will give it admission, whether for or against them, whether pleasant or painful; but they are few: they may well be called the excellent ones of the earth; for no such thing is to be expected of the bulk of mankind. The Jewish nation would have rather parted with their lives, than admitted that the son of the carpenter, as they called him, was the promised Messiah; the Gentiles also must be supposed extremely averse to admit a system of theology that condemned the licentiousness of life to which they had been so long accustomed; and in all ages and nations, people will be unwilling to admit truths, however palpable, that condemn their vices, and lay them under an obligation to practise virtues to which they are not reconciled. People talk idly about believing; but, in reality, we have the same natural aversion to admit a mortifying truth that we have to swallow a bitter potion, and do the one with as much reluctance as the other. The admission of the truth, even of unpleasant truth, is necessary to the acquisition of virtue; but a certain degree of virtue, I had

had almost said heroism, is necessary to give unpleasant truths full and free admission to the heart.

It is surprising, that this is so little adverted to by the friends of religion; and that, in the multitude of zealous advocates who have appeared in this and the preceding age, so few have made themselves master of that address which is necessary to reconcile the will to the admission of that which it strongly dislikes.

The Saviour of mankind made mention of a disposition to conform to his precepts as a requisite to our embracing his doctrine: A maxim little attended to by the generality of his disciples, who, as well as others, lay the great stress on the conviction of the judgement, with little regard to the will. Observation, however, and experience, correspond, not to their abstract notions, but to the declarations of him who needed not that any should testify to him of man, for he knew what is in him. Setting aside those who seem to be past feeling, you will hardly make any man sensible of a fault he is addicted to, unless he is in some disposition

" disposition to reform it; whereas, if a man
" has the courage and honesty to set about
" the reformation of his errors, he may, by
" the same good principle, admit a steady
" view of them: and though he is not yet
" resolved on a reformation; yet if he has
" the least inclination of the kind, he may li-
" sten to the truth; and as we are not judges
" of mens inward dispositions, it is fit to
" set the truth before them; in this persua-
" sion, however, that it will get access to
" the understanding in whole or in part,
" just in proportion to the disposition they
" are in to reduce it to practice.

" As the primary truths of religion re-
" semble the first principles of wise and just
" conduct in many other respects, so parti-
" cularly in this, that they are oft set aside,
" and made to yield and give way to idle
" conceits, which for the time are more pre-
" valent. Though it is generally allowed,
" that men conduct themselves more ratio-
" nally in the concerns of this life, than in
" those of religion and morality; yet it is
" well known, that where the necessity of so
" doing is not present and pressing, men act
" as foolishly with respect to the one as to the
" other; and, what is much to be regretted,

do not see their folly till it is too late to correct it. Nothing is more common than for men of good understanding to awaken, as it were, out of a dream, and discover, with regret, some blunder which they had long overlooked, and which, if they had attended to, would have prevented evils and inconveniencies which they cannot now prevent or remedy : and observing this take place so frequently as it does in common affairs, we are not to wonder that it should take place in the concerns of religion and morality. Men who leave the world in the full and free exercise of their rational powers, have generally a system of religion and morality of which they knew nothing before, or which they did not see so clearly, or believe so firmly, or feel so sensibly, as they do now, not through any change in the state of things, or of the rational powers of the human soul, but through a necessity they are under of giving an attention to the truth they never gave before; for had they attended to it, they might have seen the same thing in much the same light at all times. For these evils, so long observed, and so much lamented, there is no effectual

tual remedy but from one of two things; either that God would force the will of man, or that man would give up his own will to the sollicitation of his maker; and, alas! there is little hopes that either will take place. There is no ground to expect, that God will do that in favour of any individual, or number of individuals, which he might have done, and would not do, for multitudes who have already perished in their obstinacy; and that a number of mankind should, of free choice, give up their favourite conceits, and admit a painful unpleasant truth to the bottom of their hearts, is rather to be wished than hoped. However, in a matter of such deep concern, it is fit to proceed even on slender hopes.

Should the degree of probity and good sense necessary for supporting the mind against the mode of the times be uncommon, some degree, however, of those qualities may be found every where; and if a cordial reception of primary truths is not to be expected, yet a greater regard than prevails at present may be hoped for even from the multitude. Hardly will bigots and sceptics submit to the authority of
common

common sense; but as men of discernment begin to nauseate the impious nonsense which hath passed current of late, so there is ground to hope, that they will of course give due attention to the evidence which belongs to primary truths; and that a certain number, however small, will admit them to the bottom of their hearts.

C H A P. III.

ONE needs not go far back in the history of his own country, to remark many signal interpositions of Providence in favour of these nations; and he needs only open his eyes to see, that we are at this day the people in Europe the most highly favoured of God, and the most openly impious, perhaps to a degree that renders all expostulation upon the subject fruitless and vain. Many families have been raised of late from obscurity to comfortable and creditable circumstances, and many to opulence and dignity; and of these, multitudes are placed in such hap-

py circumstances, that scarce can they cast their eyes around them, without fixing on some object of delight, who, from morning to night, from day to day, scarce offer the tribute of a grateful thought to their great benefactor, or seem sensible of any obligation so to do. Many, who are not insensible of what is due to others, who would be thought to give every one their due, and who would blush at appearing insensible of the obligations of justice and gratitude, are not ashamed of the grossest failures in duty towards God.

What account shall we make of such unreasonable and unjustifiable behaviour, in people who talk much of reason and justice. Should we set aside those who have abandoned themselves to their appetites and passions, how shall we account for the open impiety of sober-thinking men, and that alienation from religion which is found in persons of delicate sentiments and amiable dispositions? The vulgar of all ranks have, in all ages, governed themselves by their appetites and passions, or by the mode of the times; but there is some difficulty in conceiving, how thinking persons, and those, too, of amiable

amiable dispositions, and respectable character, should give up all the satisfaction they might derive from religion in this life, with all their hopes of happiness in the next, to silly prejudices, or the gratification of low appetites. There is something here that merits a deeper attention than has been given it by those who have the truest concern for the honour of God, the interest of society, and the happiness of mankind. They believe that there is an all-wise, all-powerful being, who made and upholds this world; but take no care to acquaint themselves with him.—Is this rational? They cannot disown that mighty power and depth of design which appear in all his works; but hesitate about his justice and goodness.—Is this equitable? Have they any ground to suspect the Almighty of iniquity, or unkindness, or to doubt his being possessed of every possible perfection? They do not deny, that all they have, and hope for, flows from his unmerited bounty; but if he will not make them and their friends as happy as they wish and expect, and if he will not make their happiness the ultimate end and object of his govern-

" ment, they will dispute his goodness.—
" Is this modest? is it grateful? To plume
" ourselves on propriety of behaviour to-
" wards all sorts of persons, whilst the su-
" preme being is overlooked, is foolish; and
" to pretend to the character of honest men,
" whilst we are conscious of not paying the
" worship and obedience due to Almighty
" God, is a disingenuity not inferior to that
" of the grossest hypocrites. They be-
" have towards him in such a way, as no
" parent would suffer in his child, no ma-
" ster in his servant, no prince or magi-
" strate would suffer in those under his ju-
" risdiction; yet have no dread of his dis-
" pleasure.—Is this common sense? With
" all the advantages of a liberal education,
" they entertain notions of God and reli-
" gion, as low, as vague, as imperfect and
" absurd, as those of mere savages; and
" justify themselves by the subtle refine-
" ments of a few writers in high repute with
" the public. Does this way of thinking
" become a people distinguished by their
" probity and good sense?

" We have arisen to an envied pitch of
" riches, power, and greatness: Is our dan-
" ger the less on that account? Have no a-
" larming

larming symptoms appeared amongst us? What God will do, let no man take upon him to foretell; but what he may do, and what we have cause to apprehend he will do, is easy to see. And if God should stretch forth his hand against us, and after depriving those who sit in council of political wisdom, he should weaken the hearts of those who turn the battle from the gate; which, notwithstanding our natural courage, he may easily do; and if, after being incapable of supporting this mighty system of commerce, which is our glory, and our strength, we be found equally incapable of maintaining our rights in the cabinet or in the field against rival states: if a stop of public credit is succeeded by private bankruptcy, and our ears are made to tingle with continued reports of one creditable family being reduced to want and misery after another; and if, upon an attack from without, we are found a mere mob, without government, without order, without courage, or conduct,—we shall then know whereabouts we are, and what we have been doing for a century past; we shall lose all relish for the subtile refinements of free-thinkers, and

and be forced to confess, that "verily
"there is a God who ruleth in the earth."

And should one be disposed, as many
are, to give up all concern for the public,
they ought still to stand in awe of God;
because he can, and sooner or later will,
strip them of all those advantages which
are the joy and the pride of their hearts.
By one or other of those many casualties
to which human affairs are liable, they
may be soon involved in difficulties that
will bring them to their wits end. Or
al. suggestions by a secret touch of the hand of God, their
bodily strength may be destroyed, and
wearisome nights may be appointed them:
and then it is possible they may think of
God; or, if not then, yet when the evil
day comes, the day of distress and visita-
tion, it is probable they will then chuse
to call upon him. Or should they, as is
common, die in the same insensibility in
which they have lived; yet no sooner will
they find themselves shut out from his
presence, and condemned to everlasting
darkness and despair, than the thoughts
of their folly and madness, and unpar-
donable ingratitude, will crowd upon
their minds, and bite like a serpent, and
sting

sting like an adder. These are evils which free-thinkers tell us may not happen, but against which they can give us no security.

The prodigal youth will not believe that he is a fool; but, flighting the admonitions of his best friends, plunges deeper in foolish expences, till bankruptcy and a prison present themselves; and then he must acknowledge the truth, though he might have known it much sooner, because it was always plain. The pilfering servant will not acknowledge that he does any thing amiss, till he is detected and disgraced; and then he hangs down his head with shame. And the ungrateful person will lay hold on every quibble to elude his obligations to his benefactor, till he has provoked him to cast him out of his protection, and leaves him exposed to the disgrace and misery he so well deserves; and then perhaps he will see himself a worthless wretch: but he might have seen it much sooner, because it was always obvious. And we, in like manner, if we dismiss idle conceits, and have the courage and honesty to follow our own best judgement, in opposition to the mode of
the

the times, may prevent the disgrace and misery we have reason to fear, on account of our foolish, unworthy, and undutiful behaviour towards Almighty God.

Let every one, therefore, who claims a return of gratitude from those he has obliged, think of what he owes to God. Let all who resent undutiful or contemptuous behaviour towards themselves, think of their own behaviour towards God. And if any one believes, that he has a right to punish the neglects or violations of the ties of justice or gratitude to himself, let him not dare to dispute the justice of God, or flatter himself with hopes of escaping, by having recourse to frivolous pretences of infidelity or scepticism; but let him act by the evidence he has, till, by the divine direction and aid, he attains that soundness of judgement, and uprightness of heart, which will qualify him for being an object of the divine favour.

CHAP.

C H A P. IV.

INfidelity and scepticism have been pushed their full length in this age, and people disaffected to religion have availed themselves of it all they could; but all to no purpose: for as the false way of thinking adopted by corrupt courtiers, and pilfering servants, is of little avail to one convicted of betraying the interest of his country, or invading the property of his master; so those delusive opinions by which men have suffered themselves to be abused with respect to religion, will avail them little when the truth comes out. The weak belief which servants have of the fidelity they owe their masters, is not always pretended, but real; and the weak belief which people of fashion have of the obligations of religion, is not always affected, but real: yet the false way of thinking in both is no excuse; because it flows from a shameful neglect of themselves, or a more shameful compliance with the mode of the times. Every age hath its reigning folly, against which it concerns every man to secure himself;

and against which there is no security under heaven, but in that portion of good sense and probity wherewith God hath blessed him; and this, under God, will be sufficient, if he does not chuse to go with the stream; but against this there neither is, nor can be, any security.

The same fidelity and firmness which is necessary to preserve a just sense of religion among people of fashion, is no less necessary in manifold instances to preserve a just way of thinking and acting with respect to some plain duties of social life; but this virtue, however useful, however necessary, and however essential to character, is not common; and perhaps the culture of this single virtue would contribute more to keep men steady to their duty, and guard their minds against the impiety and nonsense that passes current, than all the reasoning of the learned.

In fine, we make proficiency in two most valuable sciences in much the same way; for as, in common life, the sure and short road to wisdom is, to proceed steadily by the well-known maxims of prudence, without minding frivolous disputes; so, in religion, which differs in nothing from
prudence,

prudence, but in its dignity, extent, and importance, the true way is, to proceed with fidelity and firmness on truths we believe, and of which we cannot admit a doubt, without regarding the idle cavils of sceptics.

It is impossible to give an imprudent person that confidence in the maxims of wise conduct which one hath who is accustomed to conduct himself by them; it is impossible to give a dishonest mind that perception of moral excellence which one may have who habituates himself to do what is right, and speak as he thinks; and it is impossible to give the man who is governed by sense and imagination the steady permanent conviction of the being and presence of God, which may be attained by exercising ourselves continually in keeping a conscience void of offence towards God and towards all men. There is a perception, conviction, feeling, and fixed belief, of primary truths, arising from practice, which may be a mystery to men of speculation; but is superior to what can be produced by any evidence, the evidence of sense not excepted. We are willing to substitute speculation in
place

place of action, and to expect *that* from much thinking, which is produced only by just acting; but all in vain: for if we would think with the wise, we must learn to act wisely; if we would have the sentiments of honest men, we must walk uprightly, do justly, and speak the truth from our hearts; and if we would attain the faith of God's elect, we must regulate our whole behaviour by a just regard to his authority, with a constant dependence upon his direction and aid.

Let us then, laying aside all artifice, transfer this mighty scrupulosity about opinions to practice, be as shy of acting improperly as of thinking absurdly, and be as ambitious of distinguishing ourselves from the vulgar by the purity of our manners as by the justness of our sentiments; and we shall, with the help of God, get clear of the idle conceits of sceptics, and attain that perception and feeling of primary truths, which is the privilege of our rational nature, and the true source of our glory and felicity.

The End of the Second Volume.

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